

THE CLANKING
OF CHAINS.

BRINSLEY MACNAMARA

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THE CLANKING OF CHAINS

A STORY OF SINN FEIN

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A STORY OF SINN FEIN

BY

BRINSLEY MACNAMARA

10504d.

Author of "The Valley of the Squinting Windows"



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TO
A. C.
WHO CAME WITH FLOWERS

*Was it for this the Wild Geese spread
The gray wing upon every tide?
For this that all that blood was shed?
For this Edward Fitzgerald died,
And Robert Emmett and Wolfe Tone,
All that delirium of the brave?
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
'Tis with O'Leary in the grave.*

— W. B. YEATS.

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THE CLANKING OF CHAINS

CHAPTER I

ROBERT EMMET IN BALLYCULLEN

THE little room at the back of the Court-house in Ballycullen was animated unusually and a number of young men and women were hurrying up the short stairway from the street door. It was Sunday evening and each seemed to wear an air of business curiously out of keeping with the time and the place, for this was the day of deadness and no effort, beyond that of the tongue, in Ballycullen, and this little room was musty for lack of the warmth of human industry and occupation.

It was true that every Friday of the year, with the frequent addition of Fair days, this place displayed a certain connection with life, for it was then the Office of the Bank Manager who came over from Castleconnor with his Clerk, these two hirelings of Mammon always looking very important and grand as they drove up through Ballycullen about twelve o'clock in the day. Mr. Alexander Waddell, the Manager, who always

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sat, well muffled even in Summer, on the left side of the car, was a white-haired, wide-moustached, successful Orangeman. He wore a half tall hat and a Masonic tie-pin prominently displayed. A sudden, complete impression of the man was that of the conventional caricature of a villainous Irish landlord of the early "eighties" of the past century. Mr. St. John Marlowe, the Clerk, was a young man with a beardless, characterless face. He always wore an inane, superior smile. In Castleconnor he was a ladies' man who played golf and tennis, and in Ballycullen he served as a shining example for the aspiring fops of the locality. They bought the same kind of clothes and wore them in exactly the same way, mostly after tremendous effort, and, although they had never heard him speak, since he never spoke to any of them, they often attempted to converse with the drawl which they fondly fancied must be one superior aspect of the man who wore the air and the clothes of St. John Marlowe.

"There's the Bank, begad," the shopkeepers of Ballycullen would exclaim, and immediately they would run into their shops to fumble for their last halfpence in the greasy tills. A little later they would go slipping up to this room where the bank manager and his clerk would be sitting behind a table looking very prosperous and reliable with the little piles of gold and sil-

ver, the sheaves of notes, the papers and account books before them. The shopkeepers of Ballycullen would never proceed here in couples or in companies, but each would wait nervously until his immediate neighbour had gone before him or else take an exciting opportunity of running up there before his neighbour. Even as the acquisition of the money had been a thing done secretly, furtively, evasively, the putting away of it must needs be invested with a certain amount of mystery. It was like going to confession because, for the most part, this acknowledgement of possession threw them back inevitably upon remembrance of the means by which they had come into possession. Friday was market day in Ballycullen and an addition to the shopkeepers was represented by the fowl-men and egg-men and farmers who dribbled out occasionally from the ragged crowd which represented the market, and went up to the Bank, too. These in turn were reinforced on Fair days by graziers and grabbers from all parts of the County Meath and cattle-dealers and pig-jobbers from all parts of Ireland. Always, however, with that elderly, owlsh man sitting there behind the money on the table and the sleek clerk still smiling inanely as he manipulated books and papers, there seemed to hang about this primitive scene of financial industry an odour of decay.

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But now the scene it held seemed to bring the place into intimate and joyous connection with life. The young men and women were laughing or chatting gaily as they came up the stairway. Each held a bundle of clothes, a little box of some kind which might contain anything, a looking glass or else some piece of material which might be used somehow in stage decoration. The individuals, with the little burdens they carried, appeared each as a distinct contribution to the general effect, suddenly created in the room by their unusual appearance here. It was not until the young men had thrown off their overcoats and the young girls their cloaks or wraps that their collective purpose began slowly to be apparent. The bundles were untied, the boxes were opened, each bit of theatrical stuff began to find its place. All the people in the room began to make themselves up as if for a play, the girls going behind little screens at the side distant from the young men who, despite this particular protection, remained modestly turned away as if to insure greater privacy.

Another young man now hurried in. He was tall, dark and slight with some suggestion at least of the face and figure of the idealist. This was Michael Dempsey who immediately appeared as the commanding personality of the group for the other young men turned round at-

tentively upon his entrance and even the girls came from behind the screens with some of their stage garments held veilwise around them.

"Let us have a run through for words while we're making up," he said. Then he took off his coat and waistcoat, his collar and tie and, rolling up his sleeves, went at his face, with one of the sticks of grease-paint which had just been brought in one of the little boxes, before one of the looking glasses which had accompanied them. From all sides of the room came spoken lines which very soon began to assume the coherence of dramatic dialogue but which, lacking for the moment the accompanying illusion of the stage, did not suddenly suggest the speakers in any scene beyond that of the present. Yet the lines which Michael Dempsey spoke, perhaps from the intensity with which he filled them, perhaps because they were lines of beauty which had once been spoken greatly by the man he was supposed to represent, began more immediately to remove him from the deathly reality of this little musty room. It was a play about Robert Emmet and Sara Curran that the Ballycullen Dramatic Class were going to produce and Michael Dempsey was to appear in the part of Robert Emmet. He seemed to feel intensely the dignity of the impersonation which was demanded of him. His intonation of the lines seemed to hold a high seri-

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ousness which was also a little more slightly apparent in the lines spoken by the girl who was to play the part of Sara Curran from behind the screen where she still remained dressing. In the speech of the others there were numerous blunders and the grandiose language was frequently marred by illiterate pronunciation. But there was a certain eagerness, an amount of enthusiasm which gave the quaint proceeding the atonement of life. Even as they rehearsed thus they were hurrying with their preparations and, very soon would be ready for the stage. The costumes for the play, hired from an old woman who carried on this business in a Dublin tenement, were variously anachronistic, but even the possible humour of these defects removed itself distantly when one suddenly remembered again the purpose of this little band. To-night they were going to perform this drama about Robert Emmet and Sara Curran in Ballycullen and a certain sense of their own bravery successfully blotted from their minds such minor occasions of self-consciousness. Their fathers and mothers would have come to see them on the stage as well as all the boys and girls with whom they were intimate, old men too, who through the miracle of patriotism, still echoing in their hearts from the songs of drunken ballad singers at fairs, knew well the story of that dead man who had loved that dead

woman so long ago, and loved Ireland, too, with a grandeur surpassing the common loves of men.

To the intelligentzia of Dublin this play might not appear very striking drama. "Melodramatic propaganda" would probably be their description of it, but here in Ballycullen it was as one of the great Greek tragedies of old in Athens. For all his soul might have dwindled sadly, in very truth what man was there amongst them at all had not spoken out of his dream sometime of dying for Ireland? Of how, maybe, as he went down some grass-grown breen where the hawthorn blossoms in Maytime fell and were blown on a light wind like fragrant, tinted snow, and for all its rich colour of the fields at sunset the shadow over all had seemed to him the deadly shadow of England. And then he had spoken to the girl walking by his side of "fighting the bloody British Government," of "dying from a bullet in some rebellion or another," of being "murdered, maybe in jail, the way they murdered Wolfe Tone." "And what would you do then?" Then there had come, probably, a little strained, beseeching look into the eyes of the girl as she put her soft arm about his neck, her brown, troubled head upon his shoulder, and sobbed her request that he would not go. And he had not gone, only marrying the girl a little later and wondering ever since at the "wildness" of himself and he a young fellow.

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No Irish dramatist had seen this material and yet it was the complete expression in tragi-comedy of Ireland — the Ireland of all the dreams and all the songs and all the dying.

Many a young man would be behaving just like this after to-night's performance and both the young women and the old would be weeping little, silent tears as they tried to remember or to picture themselves in the disquieting, in fact desperate, position of Sara Curran. But over all the audience, over its face as one man, would be clouding a curious mixture of expression, combative, satirical, critical, comical, tragical really in its full significance.

Already Michael Dempsey had taken the Ballycullen Dramatic Class onto the stage and they were all stiffly awaiting the rise of the curtain. One of the girls, she who was to play the part of Anne Devlin, complained of a little faintness and someone rushed to get her a bottle of minerals. The man who was to play Michael Dwyer brought out a bottle of whiskey from his pocket and took a good long drink. Then the little drop-curtain which had been so badly painted by Ambrose Donohue, the handy man, screeched upward and the play began.

One might have seen immediately that, although possessing the curious, intimate connection with Irish life already suggested, it was made

distant from Irish life by several focusses of unreality. It possessed no verisimilitude as a picture of the period, and, in the second place, was no transcript of life, inasmuch as the method of presentation was as far removed from realism as it is possible for anything to be. And yet it did not appear as any kind of spontaneous romance; one could not call it a folk play. The lines were spoken haltingly with a poor accent which did not fully express their meaning. The entrances and exits and the situations generally were most crudely effected. Yet were the people gripped for no other reason than because it was a play about Robert Emmet. Indeed Michael Dempsey need not have gone to such pains to give a great performance. Merely to have stood there on the very middle of the stage in his top boots with gold tassels, white trousers and black cut-away coat, his arms folded and a lock of hair brushed down upon his forehead would have been quite sufficient. In fact, from one aspect of Ballycullen's point of view, the whole thing was quite unnecessary. The drunken ballad singers had told them all they wanted to know about Robert Emmet and this was exactly how they had always seen Robert Emmet dressed up in a picture. Into their dull minds was crowding a sudden warfare of conflicting thoughts. "The Lord save us now, but wasn't Robert Emmet the grand young man en-

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tirely, and wasn't it terrible sad about himself and his sweetheart, the poor thing? ”

“ The cheek of Michael Dempsey, anyway, made up like the picture of Robert Emmet in Marcus Flynn's parlour when you might see him any day working for the bare life in Marcus Flynn's shop. If it was some kind of laughable ‘ farsh ’ that he thought of getting up, but ‘ Robert Emmet, ’ be the holy fly ! ”

“ Weren't the English now the walking devils to go cut the head of a great hero like that in Thomas Street in Dublin? ”

“ Why to hear my bold Michael going through the speech in the dock you'd think nearly that he'd have the cheek sometime to make a speech of his own. Now if it was Marcus Flynn himself, a good, solid man with a stake in the country, that you saw getting up on the stage and speechifying it would be something, but a brat of a shop-boy, mind you, having them kind of notions. ”

“ Musha, there must be a great reward to the souls of them that dies for Ireland like that poor fellow and Sara Curran his girl so fond of him ! ”

“ The cheek of a lad like that wanting to talk about Ireland, but sure he's always at it in the shop even. Why, I declare to God, he'd sicken you, and one only running in and out to buy an ounce of tobacco or a box of matches. ”

ROBERT EMMET IN BALLYCULLEN 11

It was thus and thus that the fume of expression arose in the intervals following the successive falls of the curtain. In this Ireland of a late little day the glory of Robert Emmet's sacrifice was less to the mind of Ballycullen than its anxiety to defeat the poor, struggling soul of Michael Dempsey, the shop-boy in Marcus Flynn's. It was the slight offense that the personality of Michael Dempsey represented to them which held the eyes of their minds, for already they hated him because it seemed to be his endeavour to lift himself beyond them.

Behind the curtain, during the last interval, another aspect of the reality which had been created by his sudden bringing of the ideals of Robert Emmet into contact with the realism of Ballycullen now held the young men and girls. Michael Dempsey was chatting with Lena Conway who was taking the part of Sara Curran in the play. Lena was another slave of the counter in Thomas Cooney's shop a little way further down the main street. She was a pretty girl with bright, romantic eyes and rich, dark hair. It was said, not without a touch of envy in the remark, always that she had the best figure of any girl in Ballycullen and that she dressed the best. Someone who had once seen a play of the same name in Dublin had bestowed upon her the nickname of "Mirandolina" and it had stuck consistently,

investing her with a kind of romantic glamour in Ballycullen. The refinement of beauty was in her musically lengthened name — Mirandolina Conway. Somehow it made one think of music and laughter and a girl dancing for love of life in a place of gloom. Now Michael Dempsey was looking down into her eyes even as he had looked, in the part of Robert Emmet, into the eyes of her as Sara Curran a few moments before. . . . It seemed suddenly as if that long scene upon the stage had been extended into this scene. . . . A mist of fondness seemed to hang around them. Then Michael began to speak for the first time to her hearing in deep, passionate tones. But, passing the love of any woman, his talk was of Ireland. It was like the talk of Robert Emmet, but they were his own words he was using now.

“And surely, Michael, you wouldn’t leave me and go give up your life for Ireland,” she said.

It was in this moment, and really for the first time, that he stood apart from the life which had always succeeded in crushing him into itself, because the answer he spoke was not quite the same that had been given to this very question by successive generations of loutish lovers as they walked with their girls on May evenings along the grass-grown boreens.

Just then they were called to appear in the last act of the play before the sweating audience of Ballycullen.

CHAPTER II

MEN AND THINGS

NEXT day, as he moved behind the counter of Marcus Flynn's grocery establishment, a thousand tremendous feelings struggled towards realization in the soul of Michael Dempsey. The sound of applause still seemed to be ringing in his ears. . . . And it was in appreciation of his endeavours that Ballycullen had let out of itself that great burst of applause, that almost tearful and wondering appreciation of him and her as they stood within the wonder of one another's gaze upon the stage. . . . Even during the short time of the play's passage he had become almost mentally metamorphosed. "Begad, he was full of himself now," to use a phrase out of the slang of Ballycullen. The words of Robert Emmet which he had spoken were being remembered by him somehow as if they had been words of his own expression. It suddenly seemed as if he stood for in his own person, with regard to Ballycullen, what Robert Emmet had stood for in his person with regard to Ireland and that the

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words of the part he had acted still continued into reality signifying the same willingness to sacrifice.

The two causes which, in his own mind, seemed to lend reality to this notion were the fact that last night he had fallen in love with Mirandolina Conway and that the part he had played had given him the opportunity of expressing in public ideas which had long been burning his secret heart, a side of himself which was well hidden indeed although the reason for its existence had once been a daylight spectacle in Ballycullen. There were times of course when he remembered his father, Andrew Dempsey, the famous Parnellite who had once owned the fine shop which was now the property of Thomas Cooney, but who had lost it through his devotion to "The Cause" and the fact that he had followed Parnell, keeping in his own rapidly dwindling way of business symbolic company with the ruin of that heroic figure. The hopelessness of his father's ending was still reflected in his mother and the sister, for when Andrew Dempsey had been finally broken by devotion to his dream all three of them had retreated to a little thatched cottage on the outskirts of Ballycullen. . . . Because he had had to be a breadwinner from his earliest years it was not a little strange that the obsession of his father should have appeared in him so strongly, with such

powers of influence upon his young mind. But it was true that, in the one passable room of the little cottage, the poor room, with the bubble window which caused such a crooked view of King John's Castle, the famous ruin which had brought more than one batch of Antiquaries to Ballycullen, after his long day of drudgery in the shop Michael fed himself by candle-light upon the more ferocious portions of the history of Ireland. His little library of well-worn volumes seemed to stand for a certain snatched, secret culture which had been always alien to the spirit of Ballycullen for the soul of Ballycullen was unequal even to great hatred, and it was the lonely creed of a great hatred that his books had taught Michael Dempsey. Here in the quiet evenings he would be alone with all the dead who had died for Ireland and through their company he would enter into a fierce spiritual ecstasy which, to common eyes, might easily appear as mere savage hatred of England, but which also contained in itself its own atonement. Yet it was queer to think of some of the books which had wrought the personality of this room, causing him, by an urgent and oppressive sense of all the shadows which it housed, to feed his mind down one byway upon the darkness of John Mitchel's mind, a darkness almost of the very grave, as his only way of release from the mean, crushing gloom of Bally-

cullen. His mind had easily formed his taste for this kind of reading, for, even as a boy, he would turn from other boys at their games to read lengthy, illustrated accounts of dead Fenians, with dark looks and dark beards, in "The Weekly Freeman." He used to pour over these for long hours with wise, tearful eyes.

Later, about the time his father died and he had come to work in Marcus Flynn's, the little paper formerly known as "The United Irishman" had changed its name to "Sinn Fein" and Michael bought it every week from old Mr. Millington, the ex-peeler, who sold notepaper, newspapers and sweets. At first he had found it somewhat difficult to understand. It seemed to be so urgently of the present, its young hope blowing fragrant as a sudden rose, having none of the musty odour of ransacked files, but clean from its undying flowers on the graves of the dead who had died for Ireland. Very soon it seemed to open to his eyes a brighter vision of Ireland in the days to be. It looked forward gladly to hope of the future rather than sadly backward to the defeat of the past. It suggested many practical means by which Ireland could enter into this future; it endeavoured to adjust its ideas to facts and institutions of the day, language, industry, development of mineral wealth, railways, local Government. It often seemed so certain to

Michael that one could have this lovely Ireland as an immediate future if all these things were done that "Sinn Fein" suggested, entreated, almost commanded, from Thursday to Thursday. *It would be revenge for the past.* In his trembling anxiety to realize the future there was, as a curious aspect of the psychology of this new creed called "Sinn Fein," an intense, dependant anxiety upon him also to be remembering the past. Hence the unchanging quality of his reading in his lonely room in the quiet evenings. Often, after some Thursday night when the current number of his beloved paper would have helped him to vision the future more brightly in contrast with the intensely remembered dark past, he would be so far carried out of himself and his realization of Ballycullen as to attempt next day, at the risk of losing his job, to impress some of these ideas towards the well-being of Ireland upon Marcus Flynn. A strange contrast of personalities would immediately become manifest. There he would be, the poor hard working shop-boy, struggling to support his mother and sister and yet live too for Ireland, by the side of that solid, ignorant man who, quite unable to realize that he had a country, knew Ballycullen far into the last byway of its possibilities. No one knew better than Michael the schemes of the lowest nature which Marcus embraced to enrich himself.

Through being forced to remain in his service he was a party to all this but, strangely enough, he seemed unable to realize it in its full relation to himself. The visions which came out of his room seemed to overcast even this dismal reality. The power that Marcus stood for in regard to his life was an immense something beyond which a certain aspect of realization could not possibly extend. There would be Marcus himself, standing hugely at his own door, fully impressive to his own satisfaction that it was by his mercy Michael was enabled to put a crust into three mouths. He would be always lounging about the shop like this when he was not actively engaged in superintending such little tricks of his trade as adulteration and making up of groceries in light weight quantities for the poor people whose means forced them to buy the necessities of life from him in this way.

It was true that all this long established system of mean roguery was almost atoned for by one courageous little effort on the part of Michael. This was the notable occasion upon which he had induced his employer to invest in a stock of Irish manufactured matches. At a local *aeridheacht* an eloquent speaker from Dublin had exhorted the people to buy only Irish manufactured goods — “Irish manufactured matches, for instance,” he said. After much persuasion Marcus became

slowly convinced. Well, begad, to begin with boxes of matches would not do much harm anyway and even if he did not make as much out of them, who knew but Irish manufacture, with all these fellows going about the country preaching it, might get to be fashionable some day and it would be just as well to have one's hand in in case it might. Mebbe Mickeen Dempsey was not such an idiot as he looked! On the morning that the Irish manufactured matches were put on sale, he was more greatly filled than ever with a sense of his own national importance. Begad, he was doing his best for the country in every damn way that a man could possibly do it, a big subscriber to "The Cause" always and now of a sudden an Irish industrial developer. . . . Coming in for the means of a smoke on their way to the fields the dogged farmers, so very conservative in every turn of their thick minds, seemed to regard the innovation doubtfully. Their first thought, naturally springing from their primitive reasoning, was that here appeared another attempt on the part of Marcus Flynn to give them bad value and to extortionate. The English manufactured article, which they called "MacMahon's Matches," was a bigger box and there was a grand picture of Marshal MacMahon on the outside and he was what you might call a true Irishman. (This subtle, patriotic touch had

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been given the article, to secure a large sale for it in Ireland, by the astute Englishmen who had put it upon the market.) They gave expression to their opinions upon this small matter as they made their purchases and Marcus regarded them the while with suppressed and gloomy profanity. Next day, about the same time, as he stood in the very same place to realise the results of his patriotic endeavours, one man after another came in, his pipe unlit, and cursing the Irish manufactured matches.

"The curse of hell on them anyway! I never endured such persecution as striving to get a smoke and the bloody things going out every minute I'd light them. Give us a box of matches that'll light, Mickeen, for the honour of God!"

It was the things which Marcus swore when they went out that finally reconciled Michael to the counter-stroke which he proposed. It was nothing less than the making of a mixture in equal proportions of the Irish and English manufactured matches so as to ensure sale of the present stock of Irish manufactured stuff before too bad a name entirely went out upon it. He regretted fiercely that a stock of empty MacMahon match boxes could not be ordered and so end immediately one of the most damnable mistakes he had made in the course of his whole business career.

The incident of the matches passed thus without leaving much impression upon Michael. He went on reading, mostly about the Ireland of yesterday in its bearing on the Ireland of to-morrow, without fully realising the Ireland of his own day or causing his own personality to bear upon it greatly. His mind was unable to grasp Ballycullen as the microcosm of that macrocosm. After a fashion he was definitely placed in the life of his native village. The housewives of the district spoke of his "off-handed way" when they bought their groceries from him. He was tolerated by their husbands and sons because the wild notions which clouded him from daily life constituted a bearable contrast, accentuating their own realism and solid worth. "Musha now, he was his father's son, a foolish idiot," they all said. It was part of his job to chat them when they came into the shop with their ash-plants held horizontally under their arms or to listen patiently as they talked endlessly about cattle and fairs and pigs and crops and land. They accepted their nationality as they accepted their religion, just passively, but they hated to be reminded of it to the extent of anyone suggesting courses of self-sacrifice more in agreement with its tradition than the ways of their lives. "Ireland or that kind of madness" was not for them. There was nothing they had greater contempt for

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than the man who talked about doing good for Ireland. And the intention seemed to creep, just a little too frequently into the talk of Michael. They would be compelled to call him to attention.

"Musha, what in the name of God, man, did you ever do for Ireland?"

Puzzled a little as to the meaning of it all, Michael would retreat for comfort to the current issue of "Sinn Fein" hidden behind two Jacob's biscuit tins at the back of the counter. Then the sergeant of Ballycullen, Sergeant Leonard, would be coming into the shop to talk about the splendid manhood of "The Force", the security of a job under the Crown and the greatness of the British Empire.

"The Lord save us," he would say, for about the tenth time on the same day, "they're a great people, the British. Look it, when I think of the hugeness of the power they've built up, why it's something terrific, so it is. Sure, there isn't a sensible little nation under the sun but's breaking its heart near to get to be an integral portion of the British Empire. Would you believe that now? Well, that's a fact. Of course the only foolish country in the world as usual is poor ould Ireland and it's me that knows it. Sure, I spent the greater part of my service in attending political meetings all over the country. It was for distinguished service at them that I got the three

gold stripes that you now see on my arm. Sure, I could write a book of recollections, for there isn't a great speech of the past 25 years that I'm not after hearing or a successful orator, of no matter what political brand, that I'm not after seeing. Aye, every one of them able to set crowds mad and everyone of them a smart fellow and sure I often thought that if the goms they used to make roar and bawl for Ireland were after hearing as many of them as I'm after hearing they'd come to have the same opinion of them as I have. It'd make a fellow laugh sometimes, but more times it would not be so laughable at all. To see fine young fellows getting set astray by designing blackguards instead of they going up to the Depot to get trained for the Force. Why, it would nearly go to your heart, so it would. That was my ambition always, to see all the young fellows in Ireland in the Force. To think of the peace we'd have then in Ireland! There'll never be peace in Ireland until we have done with oratory. If there was no fine living in it for them lads they'd soon give up speechifying and what else. I ask you, who is responsible for all the devilment in Ireland for the past hundred years or so? I'm damn sure its not the British Government. I thought all this out of my own head one day at a meeting. Why, it's the only thing for it, says I to myself, the full solution to a difficulty that has

almost surpassed the ingenuity of man. If every meeting began to be composed of peelers instead of patriots, d'ye see? Q. U. E. D. solved just like a proposition in Euclid. Ha! Ha! Ha! Give up asking for recruits for the Army from a rebel country but ask for recruits for the R. I. C. instead. Then as sure as the sun is in the sky you'd never want an army to put down a rebellion in Ireland again."

On the day after the play the Sergeant was more than usually eloquent in his blather. He kept enjoying himself thus until Marcus Flynn had gone to his dinner. It was good to rub it into Mickeen, a cur that had it in him mebbe to attack the peelers, while the opportunity offered. Upon the disappearance of Marcus his tone suddenly changed into the accents of request and supplication.

"Damn it, give us a bit of tobacco, Mickeen. I can't afford to buy it now with the price of everything and the wife sick and all the kids I have."

Michael did not refuse. Even though the Sergeant might be an employe of England he stood for an immediate, definite reality in regard to Ballycullen. He had heard of many a fellow that had lost his job through the connivery of a peeler. Yet there had leaped many moments into this day when his mind rose grandly out of the passive state to which it was chained almost con-

tinuously by means of tortures. He would go to the door then and look out at the other shop in which Mirandolina Conway daily endured the same slavery.

CHAPTER III

FURTHER REALITIES

THERE was some touch of ecstasy in this day for Mirandolina Conway too. Even the name which had been given her in the satirical spirit of Ballycullen seemed more in harmony with romance. . . . There was a great gladness upon her when she heard it spoken. In moments during the long day behind the counter her eyes were dazzled by happy glinting lights which had begun for the first time to flash queerly almost out of the gloom of Ballycullen. There did not appear to be the least vanity in the thought that Sara Curran could not have loved Robert Emmet more fondly than she now loved Michael Dempsey.

She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps,
And lovers around her are sighing,
But coldly she turns from their gaze and weeps,
For her heart in his grave is lying.

That was from the song that had been made by Tommy Moore. Even as she remembered the

familiar lines they seemed to hold less sincerity than she would wish them to contain, for had not the proud and lovely Miss Curran, a little later, married an English Officer! Imagine, an English Officer, one of the very lot that butchered Robert Emmet, and had not the poet Moore who had written those lines taken up a Government job! Michael had told her these and many other intimate little scraps of Irish history in the intervals between the acts last night. She had not known of such things, for what was she after all only a silly girl in a shop reading only the silly books that one could get in a place like Ballycullen? But now, through power of all that was hidden in the heart and in the mind of Michael Dempsey, was her thought and hope being rapidly linked with beautiful and noble things. He was so very different in his way from anyone she knew in Ballycullen. Her mind was confused with thought of him and of Robert Emmet. . . . Yet even in his day meanness and unfaithfulness had crowded around the heroic figure of Robert Emmet, and slackness and treachery had finally brought that proud life to a poor, mean ending.

The leaping gladness of her mind was almost transmuting her thought into the very stuff of dreams. Michael Dempsey had something fine in him surely, something which might yet change the heart of Ballycullen and release the poor soul

of it from its chains. But the realities of Ballycullen were moving in across her mind, a drab crowd of facts and people. Here, for instance, was Anna Maria McGuinness running in every few minutes for white spools, a lame excuse enough, even though she was a dressmaker, seeing that she merely wanted to talk about the play, for upon each occasion it was the first word that came to her tongue.

"I suppose Michael Dempsey must nearly imagine that he's Robert Emmet himself now," she said for about the fortieth time as she looked quizzically into the eyes of Mirandolina. "Musha, it was grand to see the two of yous kissing last night upon the stage and it suited, don't you know, grand, grand. I don't think I ever saw anything to suit so well so I didn't. It won't come strange to yous to be doing it in private at all and yous after performing like that in public!

"Will you ever forget when Michael made the curious blunder in the words and nearly knocked you out of your speech and out of your standing as well with the fright that he might be after losing his memory or something? It was strange of him, don't you know, and he such a great reader out and out. But sure I often heard my father, the Lord have mercy on him, say that there was nothing so bad as for a person of little or no education to read too much.

"Mebbe Ballycullen'll get too hot to hold yous now, that there'll be a touch of the showman in the travelling company about him and a trace of the actress about yourself, you looking like the picture of a stage lady that you'd see in the 'Daily Sketch'?"

"Oh, it was a great success, a great success entirely. It would nearly make anyone think that yous ought to be on for running away together and going on the stage for a living. Sure they say that once you start playacting like this you'll never be any good for anything else."

Anna Maria McGuinness had managed to crush all this show of interest into her visits for the purchase of spools which she did not want, but she was compelled by many impulses to say her say about the play. She was an old maid past all hope of a man and the one immense satisfaction of her life lay in her endeavours to desolate the bright thoughts which might be dancing in the mind of any young girl, and it had already burned her very heart to think that the long love scene between Michael Dempsey as Robert Emmet and Mirandolina Conway as Sara Curran had not been all playacting. . . . It had poisoned all her thought towards her purpose now.

Gradually, through power of these remarks falling endlessly upon her ears, the thoughts of

Mirandolina became less bright than they had been in the morning. She went often to the window and, through the brave show of fashionable drapery, looked out upon the mean street of Ballycullen. She saw some of the fellows who had so recently appeared with her upon the stage move about their business in their dirty working clothes. She viewed, pantomimically, the accompanying grins of the loud sneers which greeted them as they met others who had seen the play. Michael Dwyer! Thomas Russell! Lord Norbury! Leonard McNally! The names of the figures of Emmet's dream and doom were banded about in crude mockery, for this was a particular form of torture which would survive for a long time after the play. The satirical identification of the players with the parts in which they had appeared. It was merely another way that Ballycullen had of enforcing its reality. It was part of the effective throwing of the dishcloth of to-day upon the stained glass glories of a bygone time. . . . There now were "Michael Dwyer" and "Thomas Russell" working in the forge while "Lord Norbury," a rather insignificant looking young man, was just riding a screechy bicycle in from the school where he taught, a common slave of the National Board of Education and of the parents of the children. 'And there also was "Major Sirr," the minister's

boy, driving the Rev. Henry Connor, rector of Ballycullen, up the street in his open carriage and looking very straight and stiff upon the perilous seat in a white melton coat with big pearl buttons and a high silk hat with a heavy cockade at the side. Then there passed before her eyes Ambrose Donohue who had taken the part of "Leonard McNally." He was carrying a paint-pot in one hand and a saw in the other.

A little girl who was barely able to reach up to the counter came into the shop.

"I want a pennorth of pure silk ribbon, Miss." Then she put on a wise smile which Mirandolina thought appeared a little too old-fashioned upon the face of so young a child.

"Sara Curran, I saw you last night on the stage, so I did, and you were lovely."

Later there came grave, matronly women who said, between many winks and eloquent shakes of the head, that the play was simply beautiful but that the Ballycullen Dramatic Class were not a very select crowd and that of course a girl depending altogether for her living by the public upon her good name could not be too careful. Of course some of the class were all right but the rest of them were not all as one.

All day her heart seemed to be gasping forward towards the quiet, soothing hour when the shops would be closed and in which Michael and

she had arranged to meet. It would be something to know the comfort of his presence again if even only for a short space. He must surely be filling the drab place through which they were moving with the light of dreams and the wonder of immortal longing. This would not be the first time that they had met and moved around Ballycullen after both had come out of their shops and there was nothing at all strange in the fact that they should have slipped into this affection for one another. It was here as natural that shop-boys and shop-girls should mate with one another as birds of the same species in the trees. If either of them were of a loftier station than the other it might have been cause of the same anxiety always, but now, through power of their recent notable achievement, they had both won already to a certain prominence which might easily make Ballycullen concerned for their future. And the play too had intensified them in the eyes of one another for, hitherto, it could not have been said that they had made the same fine regard to hang as a mist of tenderness between them. Thus a new aspect of their relationship seemed suddenly to have been established which might finally perfect whatever splendour of romance this connection of their lives was destined to bring.

They met, about half-past eight, where the

high demesne wall sweeps in a graceful curve along the road to Castleconnor and the ivy hangs out a rich green continuous festoon above the footpath. There was something about his near approach to-night that strangely thrilled her with a feeling that had not been customary in such a moment. He too felt himself moving with a gladder swing and the red coal of his cigarette seemed to glow more intensely as he caught up with her on the footpath. All day it had felt as if Ballycullen had been beating them down from their high places, but now, in its efforts to abridge their emancipation, was it defeated again.

Their talk soon began to draw out of all personal aspects of the night before and to become again a part of the dream of Ireland. . . . She was hungry for more romantic history, which would link him down all the star-lit ways of her vision with those who had given their all for love of Ireland.

"Tell me more," she said. His talk seemed to tumble willy-nilly out of his disordered reading, bits of history, bits of biography, bits of poetry, bits of dramatic knowledge derived from notices of the National Theatre Society's plays in "Sinn Fein." Yet his words seemed to cause the flashing of much beauty before her eyes as he went on with unaccustomed eloquence. . . . They seemed to be walking a way of wonder although

it was only the wet sidewalk which led from Ballycullen to Castleconnor. . . . Now and then they would stop and look, with a wild tenderness, into the eyes of one another. They seemed to do this at the bidding of a common impulse, for it is only the eyes which mirror the secret processes of the heart. How much of all this distant dream of Ireland involving them might yet come true? They scarcely dared to fancy. . . . They had yet to cut a way for themselves up from the life of Ballycullen to which both were chained by strong links of the same strength. Some day it might be, but some day, as the old people said, was a long day. . . . And already Ballycullen was edging itself in to oust their momentary happiness.

Here was Michael already telling her that he simply had to attend a meeting of the Dramatic Class to-night. The reason seemed so slight and mean beside the magic that their company had made. There was some money for tickets he had sold which he had to give an account of. If he did not turn up to-night they would probably say that he was trying to stick to the money. They were probably saying that already. There was some talk of a new hall. He would probably be honoured by being put on the committee. He would feel compelled by his principles to watch and see that the committee was given an Irish-

Ireland constitution as well as all that might take place in the hall a complexion coloured by the same principles. Maybe, through all this influence the thought of which came to him as a sudden sense of power, he might yet be able to lead Ballycullen up into the noble company of the new Ireland. Yet, continually in the things she said was she still retreating within the precincts of the dream. She clutched and fondled him. . . . There was upon him also in sudden moments an anxiety to be keeping her with him this night as if the great purpose which absorbed him held some foreshadowing of separation from her.

At last, after much half gladsome, half painful dalliance, a few kisses and a few laughs, he went up the little stairway into the Bank room which, on occasions like the present, was also the Committee room of the Ballycullen Young Men's Hall. She continued down the street a little way and, passing through a dark, damp hallway, went upstairs to her narrow room over the shop where she worked every day.

CHAPTER IV

MEN OF YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY

THE little history of the place into which Michael had shown some anxiety to go set it resolutely in symbolic relation to the history of his country, especially that intense, agrarian history which is perpetuated down through power of local feuds, now taking the place of the battles and rages of Captains and Kings. It lay within the shadow of King John's castle, as they called the great broken pile at the head of the town, and, forced as it were by the conquering personality of those grim walls, displayed a certain connection with tyranny, for it had once been a courthouse.

The rich fields, which some Norman grabber had taken from the Irish, had determined the pride, importance and position of the castle. Later it was the same wealth which had caused Cromwell to come this way and blow it to hell. . . . Sometime in the Eighteenth century this quaint courthouse had sprung up here. There was a queer touch of humour in the thought that

it had been built of the stones which had been blown out of King John's castle by the guns of Cromwell. . . . From it had issued forth, under the false pretence of law and justice, the sheer cruelty which the rich fields had raised up in the hearts of men. Men had gone from it to be hanged in '98 on Gallows Hill at the other end of Ballycullen. Later, in '48 and '67 the murderous process was here begun which had ended in their transportation. And so on down to the days of the Land League when men had been here found guilty of divers offences and worthy of Kilmainham. Even this mean aspect of majesty had dwindled in the hopeless, dead empty years which followed the death of Parnell. The security of tenure which had been won for them had driven all the ancient, redeeming fire out of their souls. Men never did anything worth sending them to jail for now except drink and beat their wives and break into pubs backwards on a Sunday. Passed even was the pageant of a dark crowd of armed peelers with spiked helmets and fixed bayonets standing all round the still defeated people, with a gouty removable magistrate on the bench giving vent to his venom in long tirades about the villainy of the people of Ireland. . . .

The magistrates who assembled in Ballycullen now were for the most part sons of men who had

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done jail for agrarian crimes. They were most popular men. So too were the peelers, all, all popular men. Those who committed the more gentlemanly forms of petty felony being popular men also, the Petty Sessions Court was generally a very amusing little social gathering, the only people severely dealt with being those of the tramp class or occasional rebellious spirits who sometimes questioned the authority of the smug, contented men in their acquisitive ways which lay remote from the magisterial dispensation of justice. In fact on the whole, considering the scenes presently enacted within it, the old courthouse had possessed an historical tradition too severe and so the machinery of the law had been removed to a modern, pretentious building a little further down the street. So its consequent emptiness had determined its conversion to a Young Men's Hall. It was sufficiently suitable for this purpose, because a young men's hall, no matter how euphemistic the title might sound, was nothing more than a roof under which men of all ages assembled to smoke and spit and gossip and play cards around a fire. It was very like a public-house only it had no license. To be thus in possession of the courthouse was a triumph for the forces of the people certainly, yet, curiously enough, in the Young Men's Hall of all the places in Ballycullen there was no hint of the

spiritual uplift which Ballycullen so badly needed. Before the coming of the Hall, or "the Club" as it was more commonly called, Culligan's corner outside had been the place of assembly. A correct impression of the Hall was simply that the corner had been turned inside.

The principal part of the courthouse into which the people of Ballycullen had so recently packed themselves to witness *Robert Emmet* had once included the whole court, the auditorium where poor, broken spirits came to be awed, the dock so securely fenced with strong spikes, the arena where legal gladiators had made ferocious attacks upon one another, the high place, with the gilt and purple canopy above it, where his worship or his honour or his lordship tugged at a mangy moustache as he thought out his judgments in the interests of those who had hired him. . . . Yet the result of this almost poetic replacement was not everything to the mind of Michael Dempsey. One could not successfully link a single thought of this place with a thought of the nation. The drift of the years which had followed the death of Parnell was the very negation of all nationality and these were the years that had left the most intimate mark upon the old courthouse.

This young men's hall had been inaugurated "with a great flourish of trumpets," to use a

phrase from the local paper, and of course, as a tribute to their natural elevation at the head and front of everything, the publicans had been chosen to lend a hand and they had left, in their own words, "no stone unturned" to make it a success until they began to see in its very success a promise of their own decline. It was bad policy after all to support a thing which had for one of its objects the keeping of the young fellows out of the public-houses. They ceased suddenly to have any great interest in the hall or its objects just as soon as they became fully convinced of this. Whenever any of them came in now at all it was only in the hope of getting back a bit of what he might have lost at *nap* in the little card-room at the back which was just like one of their own tap-rooms only there was no beer. In the reading room were still a few books of a miscellaneous kind which had been presented to "The Library" in the days when the Young Men's Hall threatened to become the University of Ballycul-len. The younger and minor members of the club spent their time mostly hunched up like old men around a big stove in one corner looking into the quiet glow with silent, aged looks. . . . The thick silence was often broken by the sizzle of a spit as one was landed successfully upon the red hot lid of the stove. . . . The Dramatic Class organised by Michael Dempsey had come

as it were to put new life into something practically dead and it had suddenly seemed to some of the minor members that the Club might be made to mean something after all. And thus had a sharp division arisen between what might come to be the progressive and what certainly was now the conservative element in Ballycullen. The elderly, unchangeable men still wanted their room for smoking and spitting and playing cards in. The arrangement of dressing-rooms, etc., for a play occasioned them an amount of disturbance which they bore with ill grace. Besides, in those days before the war and its demoralising influx of money, making most for the independence of the publican, those publicans who could always influence the older men anxiously desired every penny to be spent in their houses, and a concert or a play was a thing that made away with a lot of money that to their way of thinking by right was theirs. Besides also what purpose could the fund they were making up by such means have other than the upliftment of Ballycullen which was something they did not want at all seeing that they thrived upon its degradation. Ballycullen had been growing more and more lifeless until this little stir of a clash had come. The young men, or those who were still merely eager, unfledged boys, had gathered, as they thought, around Michael Dempsey, while the elderly men

had begun to cling together angrily like wasps as elderly men always will when their authority is threatened. Hitherto the few ideas which had come to Michael from his scattered reading had only caused a poor, dumb stirring in his mind, but now the fancied emancipation of a sudden madness was upon him. It was the things that were done in Ballycullen which in a way had caused all the sadness of Ireland. And now that Mirandolina had come dancing brightly into his life the feeling that he must question the guilt of the place greatly was upon him as he entered the hall.

The ugly, discoloured walls, the remains of the law-court fixtures, expressed silently a connection between this place and bygone times, but the people who now stood waiting for Michael in one of the little rooms were most dismally of the present and its drifting emptiness. They were grinning broadly at one another about the many laughable side-issues of the play, of how one man had given a bad two-shilling piece at the door only to be ignominiously "collared" by one of the stewards just as he was marching into one of the grand front seats with his girl. . . . Of how Seumas Cunneen in the part of Michael Dwyer had tried to make it a funny stage-Irish part, like the way it would be done by a fellow in a travelling company, although there was little

humour in the lines of the stern man who had been hunted like a wild dog all across the Wicklow Hills. . . . But the bottle of whiskey found necessary to defeat the nervousness which appearance before Ballycullen brought upon him, left by accident to peep out of the pocket nearest the audience, had helped to give the part a different reading than that which Michael Dempsey, always so serious, had intended, and one very much more acceptable to the taste of Ballycullen. And thus, out of their mean outlooks on all things the talk became smaller and smaller. Then someone suddenly remembered Robert Emmet. This was Gilbert McCormack whose father had been Hugh O'Donnell McCormack, the most notable Parnellite in this part of Ireland. With his pinched face and womanish hands this man was certainly, as almost always happens, of a meaner breed than his father who had been something like a man, enduring for his attachment to a lost cause even unto destruction. Perhaps, because his own father had been broken in the same hopeless fight, Hugh O'Donnell McCormack was a man whom Michael was able to remember with the most extraordinary clearness, perhaps through his own childhood remembrance of having seen him in the flesh and in the creation of his mother's talk. He could see him always, when he looked upon his son Gilbert,

driving out of Ballycullen on a summer evening in his shabby trap to the big damp house upon his dwindling farm. . . . There in the mouldering parlour decorated only with pictures of William Ewart Gladstone and Charles Stewart Parnell, Hugh O'Donnell McCormack would look sadly into the eyes of his young wife as she said:

"Well, I suppose you had a meeting to-day?"

"Aye, indeed, Martha. We had a meeting to-day."

"Is there any sign of the persecution slackening, Hugh?"

"Oh, we had a great meeting entirely to-day. John Carrick, Martin Burke, Loughlin McNamara, Andrew Dempsey and myself. Only the few faithful followers of the Chief in Ballycullen, Martha. We had a great chat over a lot of things and it was most terrific to see the enthusiasm."

Then the sad look, falling like a mist upon her bright eyes, would show that she knew how this man she had married in the prime of his patriotism had spent his day with the others in some dark room at the back of one of the public-houses in Ballycullen talking about poor Parnell and telling them that his heart was in the grave in Glasnevin with his dear, martyred King, and striking the table and whispering fiercely the most

dreadful things about the Bishops and Priests of Ireland. . . . They would have achieved nothing by all this, for they were merely futile men drifting with their country down a dark tide. . . .

Then this pretty girl-wife had died, the broken Parnellite never realising the hand he had in her death until she was gone. But ever after attendance at some such meeting in Ballycullen he would stumble drunkenly across the fields to cry over her grave. . . . A curious madman surely this Hugh O'Donnell McCormack who might have won some respect and admiration for his devotion to a lost cause in a more decent country than the Ireland of his time.

He had not left much of a son after him surely in the person of Gilbert McCormack. "One of the biggest bowsies of a cur on the Ballycullen District Council" was the standard estimate of his character, yet he never failed to snatch at every little opportunity to give himself distinction as his father's son. He was always very jealous of any other one who showed the least promise of jumping into prominence.

Standing beside him now, huge and powerfully ignorant, was Thomas Cooney, the publican. He was here to-night for the first time in a great while, for he felt that his rights had been distinctly encroached upon. He was a man whose

life was sped by the rages of a mean mind and it was his aim always to keep people down. There were three ways in which he worked towards this end. His money stood in particular for one aspect of his power. There were so many people belonging to Ballycullen and the parish in his books that they could not possibly afford to go against him. It was an almost religious principle of business with him to give them a run of certain distance in his books so that they could not afford to be against him in any turn of politics or of business. He had never liked this hall either, although he had given it a certain amount of support at the outset. It struck at the very foundation of his power. So long as he had the young men coming in to tipple in his pub he knew that he had them at his mercy. In their strong drunkenness they were blind to the offence he stood for against the national life and their own very existence, but sobriety was a thing that might cause them to see. He clung like a big excrescence to all that was elderly and decaying in the life of his country and to him always the very notion of innovation of any kind went very hard upon his conscience. Because of many an extension of his influence the hall had declined almost to vanishing point, but now this fellow Michael Dempsey, his rival Marcus Flynn's shop-boy, had the cheek to stand for a great

revival of the hall and it was because of this that he looked upon Michael as a personal enemy with a gaze of ferocity that was perfectly apparent in the little room.

The third man, now looming largely in the group, was Ambrose Donohue, a young man of ambitions too but of a kind which were in strong contrast with those of Michael Dempsey. He possessed a certain distinction in the place of some years standing such as had now suddenly fallen upon Michael. But it was to England that Ambrose Donohue had looked for his inspiration. He had consistently read every one of those English weeklies which were described as demoralising, degrading, immoral, filthy, and west British by the Irish weeklies which Michael read. But the shoneenism of Ambrose was in more perfect keeping with the shoneen heart of Ballycullen. The flashy, cheap clothes which he bought "made to measure" in England, his loutish air and superficial manner were as one with the cheapness, the shoddiness, the frothiness of life which in this place had departed so far from the grandeurs of the ancient Gaelic civilisation. The songs which he sang were out of the English music halls, the books which he read were English drivel, the few plays he had ever seen were English rubbish also. The part he had chosen in "Robert Emmet," that of Leonard Mc-

Nally, the informer, the villain of the piece, he had given the full benefit of his cheap taste. Thus had it been a struggle between him and Michael Dempsey for applause, a struggle between the worst and the best in those who had witnessed the play to mete out the applause in the proper proportions. Ambrose Donohue was such a popular lad, never doing anything to offend them, while he kept before them at all times the figure of one to be admired as one of themselves. While always loudly making display of his distinction he remained at their beck and call, thus flattering their vanity. Besides being "the genius," as he was proudly called, he was also the principal handy man of Ballycullen. He was in the one body a carpenter, a mechanic, a comic artiste and a painter — of the fronts of public houses. This was the first occasion upon which anyone had leaped beyond him into the public eye of Ballycullen, but he was wearing the look of one who did not seem to have noticed it.

Michael Dempsey could not be described as having really entered the room until, in three sudden flashes, he was thus surrounded by the reality of these three men.

CHAPTER V

A POINT AT ISSUE

THE remainder of those present in the little room did not seem of so much account.

Not one of them was even so important as Gilbert McCormack who wrote D. C. after his name and hobnobbed with the crowd that came into Ballycullen every Friday to manage its affairs and pass resolutions declaring confidence in those who mismanaged the affairs of Ireland. It was by creating the like of Gilbert McCormack that the British Government had struck most subtly at the self-respect of Ireland and almost destroyed it. In their office and their persons these District Councillors stood fully for a betrayal of Ireland.

The petrifying influence of Thomas Cooney and the rigid conservation of thought which his presence induced were strongly upon them. In them was made manifest the gombeen-man's loudest boast that there wasn't a man in Ballycullen could as much as sneeze at him. Why, they were almost afraid to look at him. All of

them had always been pleased to imitate Ambrose Donohue, never seeming to realise at all that he also was an imitation of a further imitation. They stood for less than nothing with regard to the life in which they were fixed.

Here now, in presence of some foreshadowing of the clash which it was destined should arise in Ballycullen, their recent stirring of admiration for Michael felt somehow strained a little from their feelings and subjugated. He was a decent "gom" of a fellow right enough, but what did he always want to be blathering about Ireland for? That was no sort of talk for a young fellow like him at the present time. It was all very well for old fellows in the days gone by when a sup of drink would nearly make them think that they were Robert Emmet or Wolfe Tone. In addition to those who had taken part in the play their number was re-inforced by the Priest's boy, the Tailor's son and the Sergeant's gossoon.

Thus almost, as if by a skilful effort of stage-management, was created the definite reality which had for its object the sudden suppression of Michael Dempsey who had just been talking of doing so much for Ireland. There was a spasm of piercing pain in the thought that it was hard to reach at once beyond the limits of his narrow life, even for love of Mirandolina. The dream of Sinn Fein had lifted him of course be-

yond the life of Ballycullen, but there are moments in life when one feels that dreams are dreams. . . .

A discussion as to what might best be done with the money made by the play was already far advanced. Twenty pounds had been cleared and already it was making itself insistent that something should be done with it. In Ballycullen, money, for whose collection a number of people were responsible, always seemed to possess of itself this compulsion to uneasiness. Michael was very anxious that at least a portion should be devoted towards that purpose which was always most in his mind. As yet of course Sinn Fein had no fund on the lines of the Irish Parliamentary Fund, swollen so enormously with its shiploads of dollars from America, for in this as in all else Sinn Fein did the thing differently, but in Michael its principles were so deeply ingrained that quite unconsciously he always thought along Sinn Fein lines.

This Dramatic Class was, he felt, a form of good national work and besides there was a side to it which had for him a very subtle appeal. It seemed to stand for a kind of continuous association with Mirandolina and a making of himself a figure of the miracle she represented in his life. A slight feeling of vanity had taken possession of him, for he felt that he had done his

part well. It might easily appear that a more finished elocutionist might have done it better, for it was merely a dramatic recital of the things that Robert Emmet had said so long ago. But to Michael these were more than mere words. They seemed the rich concentration of all he had ever learned of Irish nationality. What Emmet had said Wolfe Tone had said before him and his very words had been repeated later by Mitchel and Davis. Michael had always longed to say them as an expression of his own heart and that was why he had repeated the words of Robert Emmet's part so well.

Now Thomas Cooney had never approved of Robert Emmet, and it almost caused him to speak excrementitiously when he thought of the mad ideals that the poor unfortunate fellow had attempted to foist upon the Ireland of his time. To his mind, determined realist as he was, the magnification of Ireland was connoted by every man in it doing the best he could — for himself, without being too particular as to the means. What call had any man to make an exhibition of himself by talking of dying for Ireland or of sacrificing himself for sake of Ireland? It was all good enough now to be a member of "The Laygue." It was a respectable sort of connection that brought a man into direct touch upon many an occasion with "the Leaders of the Irish race

at home and abroad." It was a way of bringing custom to a man's shop and of helping a man out of many a hobble, but to think of going further — well, damn it, that Robert Emmet must be a wild *omadhaun* anyway and he a kind of a gentleman, don't you know, that could live a soft, easy life and marry the girl if he had a mind for it instead of mixing himself up with the riff-raff of Dublin that only made a show of him when he started the little rebellion. To his mind all that foolishness which nearly sickened him was now expressed, for his particular offense, too, in the person of Michael Dempsey. Of course he had always felt obliged to distrust him as the fellow in Marcus Flynn's shop, for Marcus and he had been rivals of long standing. Consequently the proposition he now ventured came from him easily as if ready made for a great while.

"Now idle money like this should always be given to 'the Cause' and I may go further and say that it must be given to 'the Cause.' If we don't support them that's fighting our battles on the floor of the house what'll they think of us, what'll England think of us, what'll the world think of us?"

There was immediate and prolonged applause in the little room, for it was in the nature of a fixed tradition or a politico-religious rite that

Thomas Cooney should always be whole-heartedly supported whenever he made a public pronouncement of this kind. Besides they thought that they were about to be treated to a whole speech.

Gilbert McCormack's thin voice now chipped in with the proposition that it should be devoted to "a sinking fund." He had often heard the phrase used at a meeting of the Ballycullen Board of Guardians and not really knowing what it meant, he thought it was the right thing to say here.

"A sinking fund for what, in the name of God?" said Michael, stung more by its absolute unintelligibility than by the remark itself. One of the chorus, the tailor's son, made a poor joke about sinking a pump. It caused a laugh of course for there were already twenty-seven barren pumps in Ballycullen Union. Gilbert appeared quite unable to explain but as it were in support of his proposition he began to stutter further phrases out of the fortnightly meeting of the Ballycullen Board. Queerly enough, some of those in the little room began to gape at him in admiration. Even if it was not really anything at all his talk sounded like something, and the reputation of the Ballycullen Board for "dodgery" was so widespread that after all by very nature of this thought was it suggested to their

minds that his oblique statement might really contain more at bottom than the more direct and powerful pronouncement of Thomas Cooney.

The moment became propitious for a third suggestion and it was made by Ambrose Donohue. It had already been prefaced by suggestive coughs and the whispered remark:

“I wonder what has Ambie to say?”

“I think, gentlemen, it is a great chance to have the Hall fitted up with a new floor for dancing and a touch of paint on the walls and things. A bit of swank, you know! Swanks would come here then to a ball if we had one and give a bit of a tone to the place as well as to everyone that had a hand in getting it up.”

This was well said for Ambrose Donohue. It had the effect of flattering all without offending any, yet it stood to give him the distinction he had always aimed at, now more than ever, since it would seem to have been questioned by the recent performance of Michael Dempsey. Also, on account of his inclusive profession he would be given both jobs of flooring and painting and thus probably most of the money would find its way into his pocket. On the surface it sounded as the announcement of a sportsman and with the kind of appeal that must make it immediately popular. The thinly veiled sneer he had worn since the entrance to the room of

Michael broadened into a wide smile as he continued:

"You see, even if nothing more than investment, it ought to be certainly worth while. When we'd have the proper fixtures set up we could give a big dance for profit, for 'the Cause,' at any time and a little left by every time we'd have a dance, for deterioration of floor, walls, etc., would provide the only kind of sinking fund we may need."

Both Thomas Cooney and Gilbert McCormack nodded their heads at the points where consideration for their suggestions was so magnificently expressed. The others were smiling jubilantly, and they considered Ambrose Donohue a damned smart fellow entirely to have thought of it. It was not every day that such a complete plan for their own upliftment was laid before them. Their feeble imaginations struggled suddenly to picture themselves as captivating gallants dancing around and around with grand girls from Castleconnor and Mullaghownen, instead of dressing themselves up in dirty figarios out of some immoral tenement house in Dublin and then striving to disport themselves on a narrow, dangerous stage to make doubtful pastime for all the grinning idiots in Ballycullen. The words of Ambrose continued to fall psychologically upon the moment.

“ If we went on doing more plays I think that the people of Ballycullen would jolly soon tire of them. Besides I don’t think that they want much of this Robert Emmet stuff anyway. They’re a bit beyond it, don’t you know? It’s all very well for galoots out far in the country that don’t know any better but for a smart little show like Ballycullen that’s getting to be a bit of all right. I think now that my suggestion is altogether the more practicable. Do I express your feelings, boys?”

“ Hear! Hear! ”

“ Hear! Hear!” also from Thomas Cooney and Gilbert McCormack.

Michael was left without a word in his mouth so successfully had he been cornered, and he had not been given the opportunity of offering a single suggestion, for already the whole arrangement had been carried above his head. . . . There ran swiftly through his mind the thought of all the time and trouble he had given to the production of this play. To begin with how he had spent many weary nights in striving hard to talk the bare idea into them and then the difficulty of finding a proper place for rehearsal, sometimes being compelled to rehearse along the road, repeating their lines between one another as they walked. Also as they came nearer the night of production there would be the painful necessity

of dragging absent male members out of the pubs, and the female members from the intoxication of gossip in the little holes of dressmaker's shops. All the hopeless indifference, the stupidity, the despondence which he was obliged to remove continually by an enthusiasm which it was always difficult to assume in Ballycullen. Then, to assist all these in their very determined efforts to defeat him was the power of gossip, the terrible tongue-tyranny of old women who sat in remote nooks in the village prating, prating always. . . . Sometimes it was desperate surely and none knew the utter bitterness of his struggle. It was almost a thing of ecstasy, this hidden heroism, and Michael, as he went about it, often thought of those who had suffered in secret silence for some dream like this that had come out of the history of Ireland. . . . Yet it was the only way he had of showing his love in this poor place. He had triumphed even unto the success of the previous night and it was directly upon that little achievement that he wished to build higher for the enjoyment of Mirandolina Conway. . . . And here now was a sudden defeat after he had tried so very hard to avert defeat — the gigantic sneer which would spring to spread itself wide from the talk of the old women now because he had not been able to hold on to his small triumph.

It was his very success that had caused him to

make the big mistake of his life. Hitherto they had borne with him because they had not taken him too seriously, but now, for the first time, they saw in him a fellow with lofty aspirations, a bit of a brat that certainly wanted a little rough handling. The three men before him had spoken on behalf of the feeling which had been created against him in Ballycullen. . . . And they had done their work well. . . .

Before his eyes of anger passed again the vision of all he had dreamt of doing. He thought last night that he had increased his following from the handful of boys who sat, in imitation of their elders, spitting and gabbling around the stove, in fact that he had created a great impression and that the people were with him. That was all that had ever seemed wanting. Just to be with him that he might tell them all he had learned about Ireland, all he had thought and dreamed. . . . If only they would read — but in this connection he realised immediately the omnipotence of the cursed capitalised, Anglicised press. Of course they never read anything worth reading but very often they went to concerts and dramatic entertainments, and the thought of putting certain kinds of plays before them was not without its wisdom. Plays in which aspects of Irish history and national thought in keeping with Sinn Fein principles might be given, gradu-

ally sugar-coated as it were by the extraneous interest of dramatic performance, to be swallowed, possibly to the extent of creating a genuine taste and enthusiasm at some future time for the ideas themselves. He had thought of a Gaelic Class in addition, yet had felt instinctively that anything of the kind was before its time in Ballycullen. But he might just as well have tried all now as well as the part he had so carefully nursed only to die so young. The dumbness of sudden defeat was upon him and the power he had but temerarily questioned was even now more brutally strong just because he had failed.

After the way in which Ambrose Donohue had put it nothing more could be said and his way of putting it also was such that it seemed perfectly ridiculous that anything had been said at all. This agreement upon the point at issue must have appeared so perfectly obvious all the time. Yet, curiously commingled, the sigh of defeat and the shout of victory were in the air. . . .

The meeting ended abruptly and Michael's face was hot from anger and confusion as he stumbled out into the street. It was the same old muddy place lighted by the street lamps of dream no longer. In the light of a new moon it appeared coldly naked. Of a sudden was it starkly plain and of power and significance in his life, although a little while since he had

scarcely seen it at all or else only vaguely as part of some immortal scene. . . . That was to-night too just before he had parted with Mirandolina. To think that he would have nothing at all to tell her at the end of the long morrow. And she would have heard of his defeat. In fact already the rumour was spreading as to what was going to be done with the money that Michael Dempsey had made out of "Robert Emmet." As he swung quietly around Culligan's corner and down to the little house, where there was always an immense depression on his mother and sister, he could hear one corner-boy say to another.

"Well, now wasn't he a common idiot anyway to make such a lot of money for them to have the sport out of it?"

"Sure it serves him damn well right, the great actor, moryah: D'ye know what I'm going to tell you? If fellows like that wasn't kept in their places a man couldn't live in Ballycullen."

CHAPTER VI

A POLITICAL PHILOSOPHER

THE old deadness was upon Marcus Flynn's next day. Michael came out from behind the counter often to take a look at the muddy street of Ballycullen. Marcus himself bustled in and out while cursing still with the old ferocity. He had already heard of the thing that had happened and, as he thought it over and over now, it appeared more and more in the nature of a personal affront. It represented a triumph for Thomas Cooney because it was his own shop-boy, and consequently himself, who had been defeated. In the rage of his foiled spitefulness a perfect fury possessed him. Everything was wrong, everything was going to hell, as he put it. And as there was no one else in the shop while he spoke so fiercely Michael appeared as the one directly responsible for this universal damnation. Every time he passed in or out he would hit the counter fiercely with his fist and shout hoarsely:

"And be God, Thomas Cooney is a bigger man than Robert Emmet. I suppose you wouldn't believe that now, eh?"

Towards the end of the afternoon his awful visitations began to decrease in number and in vehemence and Michael surmised from past experience that he had fled from the torment of his narrow heart to the comfort of the bottle secretly in his own room. This was a day of the week, the Tuesday, when few customers came into the shop until evening and Michael had plenty of leisure in which to see his torment reflected in the muddy pools of the street. The heavy silence which held everything at this hour effectively prevented any brave thought of life from disturbing the mind of Michael towards the holiness of hope. This death in life was of no recent occurrence in this place. He rapidly figured it in fugitive glimpses of its historical aspect.

After all, and in spite of the boasted tradition of the courthouse, that place, the very thought of which caused such a recent wound of the memory, must really have sent few heroes to the scaffold in '98. On the contrary, the progenitors of its present breed must have gone bowing and scraping to the murdering yeomen as they came riding through. The mean villiany of the act of Union had called forth no passionate protest from Ballycullen. Of Emmet's Rebellion they had never heard for long years after it had happened. And in those after years, that dark diminuendo

of Irish history, it had stood, as might be expected, behind O'Connell, a contingent which was still one of its proudest boasts having gone with green and gold flags to the great meeting in Tara. The melodramatic windiness of "the Liberator" had most perfectly expressed the heart and mind of Ballycullen. To the present day both Thomas Cooney and Marcus Flynn would tell as their best stories the famous flashes of wit which had passed between the great Dan and Biddy Moriarity, the fishwoman. Ballycullen had condemned as one man the foolishness, the patent foolishness of the Young Ireland Movement. Its geographical situation had kept it from suffering during the Famine and some of the long processions of carts with food for export, from what was practically a starving country, had left Ballycullen undisturbed, although the same economic outrage had goaded Smith O'Brien to his feeble rebellion. Ballycullen's contribution to the Fenian movement had been a few informers whose descendants were now amongst the most respectable parishioners. The immense, ramified power of the middle class, the allied graziers, shopkeepers and strong farmers, had effectively stilled any notable outburst here during the days of the Land war. The men doomed to suffer always had suffered then, but this class had increased its prosperity. The later days of the Parnell split had stood for

the reveaiment of Ballycullen. Lukewarm in its support of the Chief it had been at boiling point in its antagonism. Never before had it been known to take up any cause or any denial of a cause with the same enthusiasm. It had broken the few poor faithful fools like Hugh O'Donnell McCormack and Michael's father, Andrew Dempsey. . . . Later still it had twisted, with fine opportunist agility, and become a constituent portion of "the solid phalanx," whatever that might mean, upon the side of Parnell's old party reorganised. Perhaps the tyranny of the mental state which had caused it to so fiercely admire O'Connell was heavy upon it again but it was a fact that for many empty years it had hung anxiously upon the pronouncements of "the leaders of the Irish Race at home and abroad." It had contributed of its best to the hypnotised, stagnant, tragic state. Most determinedly had it met with disfavour the co-operative movement, a tall brown-bearded man, probably "A. E.," who now occasionally reviewed books for "Sinn Fein," getting a very bad reception here on the night he had called a little meeting to tell them all about it. At the present time it was most amazing to contemplate the complete agreement which existed between the aims of the leaders and the general opinion of this place. On evenings when the paper reported a great speech by either of the

Johns — Redmond or Dillon or T. P. O'Connor or Joe Devlin — young men and old mumbled rapturously between them the momentous and golden words. . . . Their very souls seemed to cling desperately to this queer, perverted idealism. "The Old House in College Green" had become the Hy Brazil of Ballycullen. Failure in any man at all to experience the same consuming enthusiasm was put down as the most depraved factionism and a sin certainly as great, if not actually greater, in their eyes, than avowed atheism. . . .

It was not a little strange, Michael thought, out of his semi-political, semi-historical reverie, that ere now, otherwise and less admirably he must, because of what was in him, have moved inevitably into conflict with this absence of spirit. It was now about the beginning of the period when John Redmond "held England in the hollow of his hand" and as there appeared no occasion at all to doubt the immediate result the utter depravity of any form of factionism was blackly emphasised. Sinn Fein, for the moment, was in abeyance. But here and there were men working hard to keep it alive, doing little things such as Michael Dempsey had done by the production of the play. It was the like of this, in the tradition of the drunken ballad singers and the wild women of the roads, that had blown up the embers al-

ways. Now, his mind clouded by the past and clouded by the present, was he reviewing its failure reflected in the muddy pools of the main street of Ballycullen. . . .

Somebody was whispering at his elbow:

"I saw you playing Robert Emmet the other night, Michael, and it was grand, grand. But of course the mouths that you were playing it for didn't understand, but I understood, so I did, because I read in the history of Ireland everything about him and before I forgot it entirely I had off his speech by heart and could sound it out aye, nearly as well as yourself, Michael. And it would bring me a power of drink, too, this accomplishment of mine, whenever I'd go to a decent town where the blood of Fenianism still stirs in a few veins but of course, condemned as I am to live in this sorrowful place, where there's scarcely a mother's son with a bit of blood in him, for want of exercise it went out of my mind including most of my knowledge of ancient and modern history through having to be looking at them day after day, the narrow, miserable crew. . . . Will you give me the lend of tuppence, Michael? I hadn't a'er a drink yet this blessed day."

Michael turned to look at Kevin Shanaghan, one of the strangest figures in Ballycullen. A man who, still not without a certain glimmer of intellect, lived from pub to pub, and from drink

to drink. He might be about fifty, but neglect and hunger and drink had added to his years and the unshaven gray stubbles upon his white, wasted face gave him the look of a man who had descended past all hope. And the look in his eyes too was one from which hope had fled. It was a sad, wistful, famished look and might be that of a man who, at some time in his life, had been stricken by a great misfortune from which he had never since recovered. But there was one great day in Ballycullen and Kevin Shanaghan had been a great man that day. It was the day the meeting had been held to celebrate the triumph of the people in the Land War, even in this part of Ireland.

The throngs that marched four deep came like detachments of victorious armies down every road into Ballycullen with their banners blazing in the sun. And Kevin Shanaghan rode at the head of all after they had passed into one great company and with the staff laid proudly across his shoulder he carried a huge green flag with a gold harp on it.

He was a great going man, as they said in those days, a gentleman nearly, and sure he could be really one if he liked, for he had more than a drop of the noble blood and as well a fine, lovely farm of rich land. He used to be most beautifully dressed, for he was a grand, handsome man and

it was often said that he could marry a land-lord's daughter if he liked. His appearance would remind one almost of a likeness of Meagher of the Sword. People used to say that his name would go down to history, for Michael Davitt had a great opinion of him. There used to be long accounts of him in the papers, and full reports of the eloquent speeches he used to make — fine, fiery speeches about the land and about the poor, downtrodden people of Ireland. And what he was striving to do for the people was never in the hope of any reward but just for the pure love of Ireland. One could see it in his very face and feel the intense fire flashing from his eyes. It was past counting what he must have spent in "the Cause." He used to be all over the country. One day he would be down in the wilds of Mayo, another day at a meeting in the county Wicklow speaking words of encouragement, words of anger or words of comfort to the people as they might need them and as the case might be.

They used to cheer him tremendously when he would appear in public life, for he was doing great work for them every day of his life, showing clear as noonday both to God and man that he loved them more than he loved himself. It used to seem too as if he wanted to pay them for the privilege of being allowed to give up all his time

to them. He would always head the list of subscriptions when there would be a meeting for the formation of a new branch of the Land League. . . . Kevin Shanaghan £5. . . . Kevin Shanaghan £10. . . . Kevin Shanaghan £20. . . . Everyone said, to be sure, that he was a true Irishman, but that he would get it hard to stick it at that rate. . . .

While he was so busy looking after the business of all the landless people of Ireland, how could he be minding his own business, they said? He had parties minding his land for him that were robbing him and letting everything go to the bad. The day of the great meeting in Ballycullen should have been the proudest of his life, but everyone said that there was something on the poor fellow's mind. It was queer indeed and Ballycullen in the day of its deliverance too, as one of the speakers had just reminded them. Maybe he felt that when the shouting was all over he would be face to face with his own troubles. . . . But sure it was the grandest thing in the world to be standing there on the same platform with Michael Davitt himself who had always a fierce expression and one sleeve empty. . . .

When Kevin Shanaghan rose to his feet the whole world seemed filled with the tumult of cheering.

“Men of Ballycullen,” he said, “we’re at the end of the long fight and the day is won.”

The cheering rose so tremendous with his first words that for nearly half-an-hour he could not get to say another word. He stood there like a statue just as if they were after putting up a monument to his memory in Ballycullen. It was a strange thing that seemed to bring him back to life. . . . A girl on the outskirts of the crowd waved a green silk handkerchief and he smiled, but there seemed to be something very sorrowful in his face even then. . . . When he opened his mouth again he let such a flood of eloquence out of him as made the people say that Kevin Shanaghan was after making the greatest speech of his life. Then the throngs made way for Michael Davitt and himself and they drove off in an open carriage, the people going absolutely mad and they in return raising their hats for all the world like two kings. . . .

It was not long until Kevin Shanaghan had to part with his fine, lovely farm, but what broke his heart completely was that the girl he said he was very fond of broke away from him just as soon as the word began to go around that he was going down. It preyed on his mind a great deal and drove most of the patriotic fire out of him. He did not go to so many National meetings after that and of course his subscriptions here and there

were something smaller, for he had only a little income coming to him in return for all the fine land he was after parting with. He had little to do but talk all day long about the way he was after wasting his life. Between all he became a kind of queer in himself. He used to move a great deal and very quietly about the fields talking to the men who were after getting fixed in the land. Some of them had pity for him but most of them did not seem to care. "Why didn't he mind his own grand farm when he had it instead of speechifying and idioting around the country?" they'd say. It used to hurt him, for often he would go the road muttering to himself like a madman, "The soul is gone out of them! The soul is gone out of them!"

Then he turned to drink to lift up his mind, for he was after getting very, very quiet in himself. He would never be out of the public-house, where he might be seen the whole day long with a bit of a newspaper in his hand, wasting his time reading some speech or another out of it to a lot of fools who would be only grinning in their sleeves all the time. . . . It is there he would be always with a dirty collar round his neck and an inch of beard on his face and the front of his waistcoat all slobbery and shiny. . . . But whenever there would be any sort of a little meeting at all in Ballycullen the stewards would have

enough to do to keep him off the platform. "God knows, but it's pathetic," he'd say, "to hear these poor, halting fellows striving to stir the people. But sure there's nothing in them now that can be stirred even if they were able to do it itself, no spirit. Lord God, to think of the mighty gatherings of yore and how they used to respond so instantaneously to the very touch of the sound of my voice. But they got the land — so what do they care now about the noble cry of nationality? And it was I myself that had a big hand in destroying their souls." This was the way he would be always mumbling to himself at a meeting, standing there so quietly, his eyes running water and his mouth dribbling like that of a young child. Then sometimes he would let a mad screech out of him that no one in Ballycullen could ever understand: "A wasted life, a blasphemy of life! Oh, Jesus, lift up my life again!"

In Ballycullen no one ever thought of what this man had once been, for he was now merely Kevin Shanaghan, "the bowsie." Having no purpose in life he had effected something in the nature of a transvaluation of Ballycullen's valuation of him and had become a kind of philosopher, particularly on the political side. . . . Thus it might be that he had a purpose in this place after all, for often as he stood wasting his life over a pint in some pub, he would say a

thing which those standing by would treat with indifference as coming from a person of no consequence, but a few days or a week or probably a year later, if his mind had thought it worthy of notice, he would have seen such people acting as it were in obedience to the ideas which had blown casually out of his philosophy of life and the almost God like way in which he laughed over the political rages of his time. It was thus that his life had been lifted up again. In this way, remotely as it might seem, did he exercise a definite influence upon the life of Ballycullen towards its prosperity and upon his own life towards its decline; and they became more and more contemptuous of him, yet was there the same wan smile upon his face always as he observed their doings. "A fool," they called him, yet he knew a wisdom which all the mean struggle of their lives had prevented them attaining. His simple anxiety was for sufficient money to keep him "a kind of foolish" always, the only condition to which drink was able to bring him now. When he was "a kind of foolish" he dropped the best things out of his mind and was most successfully blinded to the sight of Ballycullen. . . .

Michael now put his hand in his pocket and gave him a sixpence. As Kevin Shanaghan moved away in the direction of Thomas Cooney's Michael said to himself:

“And that’s what a place like Ballycullen is fit to make of a man of intellect, who was once a man of patriotism and purpose as well! ”

Then he turned in from the door to endure the shop of Marcus Flynn until closing time.

CHAPTER VII

A REBEL

A FEW hours later, as he took the quiet way beneath the ivy boughs, it seemed that his little brave effort to snatch Ballycullen from itself had ended. It was scarcely possible that either Mirandolina or he should ever feel the same thrill in the presence of one another again. The little link, by which he had hoped to unite his own life and hers with the olden, beautiful life of Ireland, had snapped beyond repair. Mirandolina would know as she came along to meet him that for the present at least Ballycullen had beaten him in his attempt to climb beyond it. And he felt further that it was in the nature of women to be impatient of failure. . . .

This was one of the most remarkable features of the place, that the absence of two from one another for even a day might successfully undermine the fondest love or the deepest friendship by the mean light in which Ballycullen would make either, out of its malevolence, appear to one another in the meantime. She was later by many

minutes than the appointed time and there was something of hesitation in her manner as she approached him. There was an awkward silence upon both for what seemed a long while. Then, quite suddenly, she arrived at the point with almost unnecessary abruptness. She began to speak of the awful gloominess of Ballycullen in the long evenings and that wouldn't it be grand when the dance hall was fixed up? It would be some pleasure to turn to an odd time. Wasn't it very up-to-date on the part of Ambrose Donohue to think of it? Begad, Ballycullen would be very swanky then and would compare with the best of places like Castleconnor and Mullaghowen.

The mind of a woman after all affords many corrective contrasts to the romantic mind of a man, and although Mirandolina had been moved to gladness by his talk last night it was very probably because her mind had dwelt upon the aspect of his triumph which promised further little triumphs for her in the days to come. . . . But already she had begun to picture herself, for much the same reasons, as moving in the new scene which would be created, although the plan had been snatched out of Michael's hand to be made at once, in the promise it represented, a part of all the West British vulgarity which was so alien to his mind. . . .

He would have had no direct hand in doing

all this, although it would appear that he was the one mainly responsible. He thought, as they remained silent, that he might be compelled to accompany her to some of the dances, going there in half-hearted acquiescence without enthusiasm or hope of enjoyment. He grew more darkly and more sadly silent. . . . She seemed to be laughing in her heart at his very discomfiture.

Suddenly she had pity and ventured an explanation of her coldness. She told him of the spiteful relish with which the news had been broken to her, of how all the day long in the shop women and girls had been dropping broad hints for no other purpose, it would seem, than to wound her in her thought of him. Of how even Ambrose Donohue himself had come into the shop upon such a slight excuse to make a big fellow of himself in her eyes by holding forth at great length about what he was going to do to brighten up Ballycullen. She told him exactly of the way he had spoken to her:

“This patriotism and preaching to the people even in Robert Emmet plays is only a cod. What more does it do at any time only rise a few cheers and just as many jeers out of a lot of grinning idiots that don’t understand or want to understand? What we all want is a bit of fun, a bit of a dance. Life is too short to bother too much about it or about Ireland. Just to make the best of it

and not to take it too seriously ought to be our ideal. Sure if you were to become the greatest patriot in Ireland, a second Parnell for instance, they'd throw dirt in your eyes in the end just as they did with him. The man that would try to lift Ireland out of itself that way was only a bloody fool for himself."

"A bloody fool!" It was the most expressible epithet of derision and degradation in Ballycullen. Kevin Shanaghan, that fallen and besotted man, was a typical example of its correct application.

As she clung to him he knew that her sympathy was sincere although he felt also that it was of the nature of a woman to be glad only of the success of her man. . . . Always eager to feel this subtle correspondence it almost seemed, because of his own sadness in the desolation of his pride before the eyes of his girl, that hope of final triumph had, for the moment, been put away as an ended longing from the mind of Ireland. . . .

Although he tried to talk on of other things she did not show much wish to linger with him and he was not without a certain thankfulness that this was so. He was about to make an accustomed retreat for a little comfort. The power of Ballycullen was driving him remorselessly to this, it suddenly seemed, even as it had driven Kevin Shanaghan to drink. . . .

They parted quietly and soon he was hurrying along a narrow road where there were clusters of labourer's cottages. Already he had often gone like this, but never quite in such a hurry as to-night, to the house of Connor Carberry, an old broken man in whom the flame had been lit in '67 and so brightly that the power of Ballycullen, or the wide world through which he had wandered, had not sufficed to quench it.

Although it stood in the midst of rich fields the cottage always gave one the impression of loneliness and desolation. Even the richest vegetation around it at the noon of summer, the brightest blossoms of lilac and hawthorn springing bravely from the green profusion of the low hedge before the door, the sunlight of the Irish evenings making golden its crooked windows never succeeded wholly in driving away this forlorn look. It seemed as if someone that the cottage knew well had beaten a broken retreat to the loneliness of this quiet place.

And yet, one is never right even in what seems the most indisputable surmise of the self-evident, for it could not be said after all that Connor Carberry was a lonely, forsaken man. He too had his good comrades in the end of his days, the friends to whom he whispered out his soul, and what can any man have more, even one who has been rich and great and had the biggest share of the world?

Yet no one had ever seen his companions come here of an evening, with no Heraclitus of his heart had he ever "tired the sun with talking and sent him down the sky." Passers-by who would see him standing sometimes at the door gazing out over the luscious land would speak their pity of the wan, famished look upon his time-scarred face and say that Connor Carberry was the loneliest poor man in all the world. He had himself to thank for it, they said, for when he had returned here after his long sojourn in the Bush of Australia many an old man had limped up here from the village or across the fields in the evenings to talk about their young days together with Connor Carberry. But the experiment had not been successful, and the offering of their friendship and their remembrance had not been accepted. In Connor Carberry they had discovered the strangest thing that may befall a man, they saw one who had forgotten, and after all what has an old man but his memory and the things he would be remembering of his youth? . . . As they came into the cottage and sat down, their bodies humped heavily over their crooked sticks, one by one, and for many an evening before they had finally grown tired of trying to make him respond. A little light, the joyous light of the great power of memory, had welled into their rheumy eyes. . . .

“D’ye remember, Connor, the ferocious game you played the day of the great match between Castleconner and Mullaghowen? . . .”

“D’ye remember the escape we had that dark night in ’67? . . .”

“Don’t you remember the dances and all the fine, lovely girls you used to have breaking their hearts after you them times, for you had the lightest foot of e’er a lad in the parish . . . ? And musha, don’t you remember Martha Doyle. Sure she was the handsomest craythureen ever lived. Maybe you never knew that she waited for you for long years after you’d gone to Australia. She had some notion, I suppose, that you’d send for her, so she never had a mind for anyone else, for it took the two of yous to make a dancing pair . . . ?”

No word from Connor Carberry sitting there so silently upon the other stool, no sudden stir of recollection to make his eyes as bright as theirs. There seemed to be some great grief in his mind across which their regard for him as friends of their youth could not make a bridge. . . . No word from him at all, only queer talk of black men and Chinamen, and Japs, and all the other heathens with whom he had sojourned in one of the wild places of the world. . . .

They had grown tired of trying to be a solace to his loneliness and a comfort to his friendless

age here in this little place where he had been born. So no one ever came into the cottage now, yet Connor Carberry still retained the brightest power of his soul and he was not lonely. They thought maybe, that he was a queer man who had no regard in his heart for his country or the friends of his youth, an inhuman man. God knows but it was this terrible thing they must think of him, an inhuman man that was best left to himself.

They did not know of that awful period in his life, the dark blank when his mind and his blood seemed to stand still for very sorrow on leaving Ireland. Then there had flowed in upon his consciousness the immense loneliness of "the Bush," when for long periods he might only talk to his dog and his horse and the sun-scorched trees. It was to those dumb things he had whispered all his heart's love of Ireland, whispered through the agony of his tears, whispered, sang, aye even shouted madly to dumbness until the very voice of his love grew dumb within him again. . . .

It was their fancy to think that he could not remember now beyond that dark night that had fallen upon his mind, he could not recollect, he could not refashion in fancy the scenes of his youth, he could not make good comrades of the old, old men like himself. . . . But he was not without his good comrades although these

were unnoticed by human eyes, for they were not human. . . . There were Trixie and Peg and Lord John. They were all that he wanted to be talking with through the length of the days that were left him. . . .

Trixie was a fine cat still, although her left fore-leg had been cut away by a trap in the woods of the Hon. Reginald Moore.

"My noble Persian kitten, my noble Trixie," he would say as she purred upon his shoulder. "Trixie must have her saucer of milk now, and then we'll have a talk about Australia, a great chat about the wild, ungodly places of Australia."

The contented purr of Trixie would tell him that he had an attentive listener to the long sameness of his narrative of "the Bush." He could tell her all. He could tell her of the gorgeous women he had seen. . . .

Long before Trixie had grown tired Peg would come out of her box near the fire and begin to peck about his feet.

"My lovely checker hen," he would say, and putting Trixie gently down he would take a handful of meal and as she fed out of his hand he would say his say to her about the bright birds he had seen flitting through the dark trees and of how their rich plumage had splashed his loneliness with colour. The tenderness of Peg and all

her delicate movement about his hand would recall all the tender thoughts he had had in exile.

Then, by the time that Peg was ready, that is, sufficiently fed and sufficiently regaled by his conversation, to be put back in her box which he also called "her bed," for Peg was a kind of delicate bedridden hen, there would be loud calling quacks from the outhouse at the back.

"Lord John," he would say, "Lord John is hungry now, the poor fellow!" Often as he mixed up the feed in a little dish he would smile as he thought of how well he had christened Lord John after Lord John Rochfort-Pelham whom he had fought to the death beneath a starry sky in the very lonely midst, it would seem, of all the lonely sheep-runs. . . .

This other Lord John, this champion Aylesbury, could listen well to his wild tales of fighting and drinking, and his strange and startling accounts of the many times his very blood had tried so wildly to burst the bondage of his loneliness. A loud quack! quack! of enthusiasm well placed here and there was Lord John's way of showing his appreciation of this long account of how the brute had often leaped to life in Connor Carberry but which the years had now so well subdued.

It was only to these, his good comrades, that it had been given to know what Connor Car-

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berry had lost to his soul and won to his soul during his long years of exile. . . . But every man, they say, has two lives, two souls, which it takes different men and different moments to evoke in turn.

Connor Carberry was a proud, valiant man still, even in his loneliness and defeat, and as he sat here in his quiet cottage, by a poor fire of an evening the lights which danced across his furrowed, wasted face seemed to mirror some of the beauty he had seen. Although lonely to all seeming, he was not lonely, for he dwelt remote with those who had died for Ireland. The only one who ever came now to make a *ceilidh* with him in the evenings was Michael who merely came as it were to listen to his rambling talk which sometimes grew into the semblance of conversation with those who were dead and gone. . . . They were a right goodly company beginning with Owen Roe O'Neill and including Charles Stewart Parnell. His own defeat did not seem sufficient, for nightly here, in the emptiness of his old age, he lived through their lives and endured their struggles and defeats. Had they known of this at all they would have said that his mind had been touched, God help us, by the long, long years he had spent out in the hot sun of Australia.

“Comparing himself to the great patriotic men

of Ireland he does be, the poor, unfortunate fellow!"

It was thus that he would have been fixed in the minds of his neighbours and when he rose up raging at the end of a long night's brooding and communing and shouted: "Oh, Lord! Oh, God, when will it all end, dear Christ Almighty?" he was very like a madman surely. He had suffered in exile for Ballycullen but Ballycullen was quite forgetful of his sacrifice, yet he was full of forgiveness of this offense against himself in his fierce, angry love of Ireland. Even just as he seemed to exist remotely his sentiments sustained themselves without any reference to reason or any practicable scheme of well-being for his country. Indeed he had scarcely any comprehension of the present at all, for his mind seemed almost incapable of removing itself out of the past. And how well he had concealed his memory from Ballycullen! What little reality may have been in him must have died with Parnell but often, on a night like this, he would break out of his dream for a moment and say a memorable thing to Michael:

"A man never died for Ireland, nor a man never went to jail for Ireland, nor a man never spent long years of torture away from Ireland, nor a man never suffered in any way for Ireland

in vain, and that's the God's honest truth I'm telling you, young fellow."

Spoken again with the old intense sadness these words seemed on this night of his life to hold a sense of holy comfort for Michael that was very sweet to his ear. But as Connor Carberry relapsed into his raving, a thread of grey questioning seemed to run through his mind as he listened, sitting on a low stool and looking also into the poor fire. . . . Through his very intensity appeared the very sadness of the obsession of this old man by the heroic side of all the queer business of Irish history. There was a rapturous exaltation about all this beautiful and pure dying, but was there not something further in this connection which the present trend of his thoughts was compelling him to feel? Could England be such a fiendish enemy after all when it had not succeeded in trampling out this heroic spirit down through all the years? Those who had sold themselves as common informers or worse, if anything could be, although sufficiently formidable in numbers were, after all, comparatively few, but what of the greater traitorous element in the heart of Ireland itself, the murderous apathy which had crushed more powerfully, more subtly than the ostentatious tyranny of Britannia because it had so successfully remained unseen? That was the ghostly, silent, deadly thing which enslaved. Yet

was it the stuff that Connor Carberry talked, even when mouthed meaninglessly by politicians, that had blinded the eyes of Ireland to this terrible thing. But it was hard to listen to Connor Carberry and remain unmoved. . . .

Surely Sinn Fein included a quality other than this dwelling hopelessly upon old unhappy things, the bitterness of defeat, the sad endings of broken men. This was its constructive side which spoke bravely of the building of the nation from within, the goodly thing which cometh of an honest conscience and a man's right hand. Their industries might be revived, their language, they might attain to a certain decency in public life, they might come to control their affairs if they desired it greatly. . . . If only all the people of Ireland could be made to feel the truth and beauty of Sinn Fein! If that could not win them national salvation nothing surely in God's world could! It would be sufficiently strong and proud too to throttle even the subtle, traitorous element in a death grip!

Yet here was he, a Sinn Feiner, fled from the tyranny of a portion of Ireland at the present time, hoping to win a little consolation from the past as remembered by the wild mind of this sad man. . . .

He wondered momentarily was Sinn Fein, for all its brave show of hopefulness for the betterment of the present, really dependent in its essence

upon a sense of the past. . . . To be here listening to Connor Carberry was indeed very like the way of Kevin Shanaghan solacing himself by drinking in a pub. . . . It was an attempt to win the comfort of forgetfulness. Yet it was something to feel that he would go from this place with his dream annealed and just as if nothing had happened to hurt its loveliness. And he knew that when Connor Carberry would rise at the end of his long monologue to lunge savagely at the door with the rusty imitation of a pike he had hidden under the stairs, not even the flicker of a smile would disturb the calm intensity of the trance-like emotion which would be mirrored on his own face. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

INCIDENTS OF THE DANCE

THROUGH the remainder of the winter of 1913-14 there was scarcely anything spoken of in Ballycullen but the new hall they were making out of the old courthouse. This notable attempt at transformation seemed to absorb the activities of the villagers. Apart altogether from the admirable ambition to see a place of amusement in their native village there was not a man in Ballycullen but was making his bit out of it somehow, men like Thomas Cooney and Marcus Flynn who sold building materials, as well as everything else under the sun, masons, carpenters, painters, limeburners, sandmen, labourers and handy men. To create such vast employment it had been found necessary to extend the scheme far beyond its original conception and money had been borrowed from Mr. Alexander Waddell and Mr. St. John Marlowe, twenty-four good, solid men assembling in the musty premises of "the Bank" one Friday to give their security. The small sum which Michael Dempsey was instrumental in making had

been swallowed up in preliminary expenses and Ambrose Donohue, the architect, as he now styled himself, had already managed to arrange for the expenditure of the second. A sense of eager futility lay heavy upon Ballycullen.

It almost appeared as if the passion which had flowed, even out of the Ireland of his time, into the soul of Michael was now ebbing away. There seemed to be some power creeping into the world which stood for the putting away of all clean things. Sinn Fein had grown very timid, its small voice sounding a note of apology almost for its own existence. Some vulgar, shoving thing was edging it out of the world. An exemplification of the ugly process was happening here just now in Ballycullen. They could talk of nothing but the hall and the dances they were going to have. The healthy pleasures of the hurling or football field with a dance, in the company of bright-eyed girls at the end of an epic day, in some barn or by some cross-roads had held a quality at once beautiful and Irish but all this efficient organisation of something which should spring spontaneously was vulgar and British. Well and truly had Sinn Fein laid stress on this from the beginning, the absolute indecency it was for Irish people to ape the ways of their conquerors. There was a great deal of this kind of thing in Ballycullen. The young

men who did read looked out at life through the eyes of "The News of the World" and "The Umpire," the girls coloured all their romantic notions by attempting to apply sentiments from Charles Garvice and to imitate photographs in "The Daily Sketch." . . . Michael often thought that, were the English gifted with much sense of humour, they must laugh hugely at what might here be seen. Although he did not know the story by Balzac of the Ass in the Lion's skin it was of some such laughable pretentiousness he thought whenever he would allow his mind to dwell sufficiently long upon the shoneenism of Ballycullen. . . . Yet, in immediate, tremendous offensiveness, was the thought that, because of the wave of prosperity now creeping over it, his country, in the direction of many social essentials, was rapidly assuming the mentality of England while there was still something, it might be in the very air and colour of the green fields, which still clung them pathetically to the old picture. . . . Great God, why could not Ireland possess that oneness, that rich content of correspondence with its own soul which is what one should mean by nationhood! This much was certain, that in no country in the world had the word nationality been so often used and yet always so misapplied. It might be that the emancipation of the Irish farmers had caused them

to discover a mode of expression for their freedom. They came drunk to dances in their motor cars and did their best, in spite of a poor education and an amount of peasant crudeness, to ape the manners of landlord's sons, a class they had replaced. The strong farmer had become the Irish country gentleman, just as it should be, an Irish man living in his own country and possessing the means to keep up a certain "style." The middle or smaller farmers were driven in turn by their women to ape these and the smallest farmer often produced a daughter who, as a symbol of this spirit, would sit by the fire all day dressed in the tip of the fashion and reading silly romances. The shopkeepers in small towns like Ballycullen were identical in the same exhibitions of emancipation. And then there was the mob, those to whom all these made a kind of vague headline to be copied indiscriminately. Drunkenness, vulgarity and pride were everywhere to be seen. To all seeming the ancient, ornamented pattern of Ireland might be the same and running in the same moulds, but to him the metal was heavily alloyed at its very source. Would they be worthy even of Home Rule? He often thought not in moments of extreme despondence, although that catch-cry of the politicians almost appeared a blasphemy to him as a Sinn Fein.

* * * * *

He was one of those who came to the first dance in the grandiosely converted courthouse exactly after the fashion in which he had fancied he must come here. He had merely bought a double ticket and so had come with Mirandolina. Their friendship or affection had not progressed to any surprising extent in the months which had intervened. They had met of evenings pretty frequently but always, as it were, under the shadow of their disappointment. It seemed to abridge continually any long flights into the richly coloured country of Romance. Always it seemed that this lovely and fine thought of Mirandolina was made so small and timid and that he must be no different in her eyes from any poor brow-beaten shop-boy whom she might meet in a hundred other Irish towns if she went away from Ballycullen in the morning.

Now that the days had lengthened out their meetings would be less and less frequent. In fact, because of their enforced timidity, such opportunities of intercourse must have vanished altogether by the time the summer had come, when their moments together should be confined mainly to Sundays. Leaving the village at different times and by different roads they would meet in some distant place after going circuitous journeys still half afraid as they walked, rather more it would

seem with their bicycles, than with one another in the sunlight. . . .

However, on the occasion of a dance, such as the present, no one minded. Flirtation or whatever it might be or be called was on such a night a thing to be paraded rather than hidden. It was always a night of the pride of all things in Ballycullen. It was a night of artificiality and show working only towards the success of those thus inclined.

It was a great night for Ambrose Donohue, for he had used a good deal of the money made out of the scheme of recreative improvement towards further correcting the lout in his appearance. He had even gone so far as to hire a dress suit from Dublin. In this the moment of his triumph he appeared particularly anxious to extinguish Michael. The attentions he so forcibly lavished on Mirandolina became rapidly such as no girl could possibly resist or refuse. Thus very early in the night was Michael left without the companionship which alone could make this place bearable and also without his only excuse for being here. . . . It was a blow too that he had not expected. The last vestige of glamour faded from the scene around him. . . . He saw, with almost sickening clarity, the gaudy, untidy, untasty attempts of poor-looking girls to adorn themselves, their amateurish attempts to paint

their faces in imitation of women of the streets and women of the stage. . . . He saw even Mirandolina flash him the look of the light woman from her crudely pencilled eyes. . . . She had thrown herself upon the winning side, for it is in the nature of a woman, as he had already felt, to applaud the victor. In sudden darkness he felt the almost decadent weakness and colour of scenes which made him think of scraps of ancient history he had read wherein was pictured the lustful look upon all things which comes before an Empire's fall. . . . His countrymen in flattery of England were already wallowing. . . . It was strange to think of the inevitable fall of the British Empire being fulfilled prophetically in them. . . .

These well-fed agricultural gallants were now crowding, mostly drunk, around the bar. They were spinning yarns out of their adventures which had happened mostly in Dublin and, as they talked, Dublin suddenly appeared a very wicked place indeed. Michael, with an intensified, dramatic sense of his characterisation saw Ambrose Donohue come amongst them. Companionship was here easily effected, for these were his equals. He too was a story-teller of this kind and what was better still he could flatter their vanity by making funny, plagiaristic attempts to tell them, as his own, stories which were of their own au-

thorship, brand or copyright. They patronised him with amusement to themselves as he abased himself abysmally in their sight. He hung around them in accommodation while they made him the wisp of straw, as it were, upon which they wiped their dancing slippers as they made entrance to different aspects of their grandeur. . . .

A few moments before Michael had been almost vexed that his lofty and remote aceticism in Ballycullen had always placed the comfort, such as it was, of drink beyond him. In such a time as this it would be a comfort surely. . . . Immediately he felt a kind of gladness of emancipation as he was compelled to hear. . . . The talk continuously, endlessly, appallingly was of women and of women. . . . Ambrose Donohue was contributing some very realistic remarks to the symposium. It was in anger that Michael thought how this fellow had been so recently dancing with Mirandolina. . . .

He went out again amongst the dance where the blessed light of day was beginning to break in and flood over the artificiality of the dance. The whole gay scene was coming to appear so poor and mean. . . . Mirandolina looked frail and faded as she sat by the wall. Another dance had begun to move round and round and she appeared momentarily very deserted sitting there. . . . She gave Michael a long, quiet look, but he

passed her unmindful and did not mingle with the dancers again. He got his coat and went out on his way homeward. After all it seemed a slight incident to have marked this night for him with such dark emphasis. But in a place like this where life moved in hidden ways, in fact almost as an undercurrent always, there were many who saw in his going the melodramatic touch which distinguishes all the real happenings of life and so it reminded them to the verge of weeping sentiment of sad moments in the stories which were slipped over for their consumption from England. . . . A night such as this always marked the ending of old romances and the beginning of new romances which would be new and bright for only a little while. . . .

She was after being foolish enough "to get her name up with him" and now they were very glad indeed to see her give him the go by. It was a further and no doubt for him more painful aspect of his defeat. It was a pity he had ever given his ambition towards the upliftment of Ballyculen the dramatic turn, for in their narrow eyes, as in those of the English Law, the stage player was resolutely fixed as a rogue and a vagabond. Also the stage was to them very definitely synonymous with certain ragged little bands which came here heralded by huge, lying handbills. These always set up their show in patched canvas booths

and performed such thrilling dramas as *Sweeney Todd*, *the Demon Barber*, *East Lynne*, *All for Love*, *Only a Mother*, etc., etc. "Admission 6d: Front seats 1/— Children half price." At night the hissing duck lights lent some aspect of wonder to the show but during the day, when the men drank in the dirtier pubs and sucked at "Woodbines" stuck almost continuously to their lower lips, the women looked for milk and bread while the choice people of Ballycullen spoke their pity of them just as if they were mere tramps. The animosity already stirred in such minds had caused them to picture Michael as doing something like this with Mirandolina Conway who was a very nice girl, or at least they were ready to say so in their moments of deepest spite against him. . . . Indeed and indeed for many and many a reason were they glad of his discomfiture as he went out of the dance hall. . . .

The bloody, cursed cheek of him anyway, the damnable ideas and the talk of him, the way he used to be talking about the strike for instance. It was the great Dublin strike of 1913-14 to which they referred, a thing fought very remotely from Ballycullen for many reasons. Michael had been heard to drop words of sympathy with the strikers, although "Sinn Fein" had not been with them and the employer controlled press was very solicitous to censor anything in the nature

of a decent opinion. . . . It was very meet indeed that Ballycullen should be remembering this against Michael in a moment of gaiety. . . .

“ But, the Lord save us, anyone that’d have a good word to say of either Connolly or Larkin was nothing short of a scandal! ”

This was the word which sprang from the thought of Ballycullen, with such vehement enthusiasm did it place itself on the side of the angels in opposing the workers of Dublin and their leaders. . . . A fitting punishment had now been visited upon this fellow for his championship of such blackguards.

As he turned the corner of the old courthouse Michael saw a man standing up against one of the high windows with his nose flattened white against the glass. . . .

“ Musha, it’s nor the same way we all go mad,” said the man smiling down queerly at Michael as he went by. It was Kevin Shanaghan eagerly watching and waiting to drain the bottles and the half empty glasses when the revel was ended. . .

CHAPTER IX

THE URGE OF ULSTER

THE winter yawned balmily out of its sleep into the wild, bright days of spring and the coming of Home Rule was heralded by more and more intensely excited groups that remained longer and longer talking on the street of Ballycullen in the evenings. Strangely enough, in preparation for this long-sought freedom, there was a more determined return to drunkenness and all the ancient rages which drew their inspiration from the bottle. Rumours came through the papers of the arming of the Orangemen in the Black North and of course, being countrymen of their own, the people of Ballycullen hated this unholy tribe more by a great sight than they hated England. This arming was a most damnable business, they all said.

There was a prophecy prevalent hereabouts that the Orangemen would break loose some day and never stop until they came to the Bridge of Athlone where an old woman with a stockingful of stones would stop them. Meanwhile they would have massacred all the "Irish" in their

track. And by a curious misfortune Ballycullen lay directly in the curved course they would take between Belfast and the Bridge of Athlone. And they were all "Irish" here. . . . Then came the Larne gun-running, and for the first time in its long history Ballycullen became genuinely alarmed. It was something shocking to think of it, Ned Carson and Campbell the lawyer and the Marquis of Londonderry and Captain Craig and Galloper Fred Smith coming down from Belfast with a lot of raging devils to kill them all. . . . Their enthusiasm for Home Rule, which somehow seemed to stand for little beyond protection of their own skins, now became absolutely tremendous. In their sudden fear and excitement they did not know exactly what to do with themselves. Often now, his meetings with Mirandolina having been ended by the dance, as Michael strolled disconsolately down the street after closing time he would hear them talking excitedly in little groups:

"D'ye know what it is now? Any man that wouldn't make a stand against them bloody ruffians from Belfast, d'ye know what I'm going to tell you now? He'd be no man."

"Well, here's me for it to the last! "

"Aye and me. I was never a great man to talk about Ireland but I'd never stand to see that day lived over me! "

Of course some remark directly about him would be dropped just as soon as he had gone by and immediately they would fall to wondering why Michael of all people "and he full up of Ireland" should be taking the whole thing so coolly. Why, man alive, he had a kind of a smirk of a grin on him enjoying it, begad! And certainly he did see something to laugh at — sadly — in these days in Ballycullen.

He saw something fine about all this fierce intention of the North which made it truly comparable with the Ulster of Henry Joy McCracken and William Orr. It stood most truly for the olden beautiful spirit of Irish Nationality. Ulster's cold exterior had hidden this for so long like the spark embedded somewhere in the flint, but all the softness and slobberiness, all the heart-wearing on the sleeve of the rest of Ireland concealed no fire. It had all been frittered away in blather and in Ballycullen were they blathering still. The mind of Michael was with the men of Ulster, but experience had already taught him not to be too free in letting known his mind, and open expressions of his opinions now would be far more disastrous than his foolishness in speaking well of Connolly and Larkin. In consequence he knew the joy of pondering his thoughts in unsullied loneliness, for there comes a great kindliness from the unspoken thought. Al-

though he never met Mirandolina now he had not heard that she was yet "friends" with another. There was no bitterness in his mind regarding her, but somehow he saw Ambrose Donohue more clearly than ever before. Continually this promising young man came smiling diplomatically to discover his opinion on the present crisis, but all his attempts so far had been unsuccessful. By intimate contact with the facts of life which he sought to change, the Sinn Fein spirit in Michael was rapidly becoming more practical. It was the traditional importance of talk which may have been responsible for the blunders he had already made. Ballycullen had not succeeded in making him in the least like itself, yet this caution he had acquired was essentially of Ballycullen. But he knew that should he be so foolish as to discuss this Ulster business with Ambrose Donohue that eager young man would immediately reproduce it as well-reasoned out matter of his own towards his own benefit for the enlightenment of those now wildly anxious to know what to think. But he was not to be drawn by even the most intense exhibitions of confidence. . . .

It gave him some pride in himself in these days to feel around him all the seething anxiety which he might have ended at his pleasure, yet was he almost angry to feel that, could he speak to them out of his love for Ireland, they might see a clear,

gleaming way. . . . Then suddenly he grew more angry to see that the Party, which to his mind had left the mark of the beast upon Ireland, was endeavouring to produce upon large National lines something which seemed but a faint copy of the fine spirit of the North which Carson, although only another political trickster, had evoked in its real sincerity. They were a sufficiently subtle crowd, he knew, and probably their real object was to destroy the very thing that they now seemed solicitous to endorse. The result of all this eloquent striving might become apparent in Ballycullen at any moment. This must be very interesting indeed, Ballycullen summoned collectively to effort in obedience to the mandate which would go forth. He thanked God for his share of humour, more particularly because in the days of its fear the quality of humour was notably absent from Ballycullen. If it really came to fighting the Orangemen in Ballycullen he wondered how he should be fixed. There would be the form of conscription created by a strong public opinion and this he knew would be very powerful. Marcus Flynn himself would probably order him to service for Ireland as part of the duty he owed him as his shop-boy and a servant of Ballycullen. . . .

Then what he had most feared came naturally, almost as an inevitable result of the political

whirl of the time. It was the announcement in a flaring poster that a meeting to form a corps of the Irish National Volunteers would be held in Ballycullen upon the date therein mentioned. The very thought of it was almost maddening. It seemed such a sin against the progress of the world, not to speak of common decency or think of the olden, beautiful traditions of Ireland. It was treacherously anachronistic, more nearly blasphemous. The platform, perhaps in an endeavour to perpetrate a touch of irony, would be erected beneath the shadow of the new courthouse. It would be built of rough planks laid upon empty half barrels out of the pubs. The other fixtures of the platform were stored upon the premises of Thomas Cooney, like the fittings of a stage laid by from performance to performance. The only thing ever requiring replacement was the top rail of the platform, which had been frequently broken by the fists of very powerful local speakers in driving home some important point. Now were all these queerly symbolic things to be dragged out into use once more, like the things of a child's playbox. A new aspect of Irish Nationality had been suddenly discovered, and so the annual pageant of the platform must be held beneath the laughing skies. . . . Parnell had spoken from this same platform and Michael Davitt, and William O'Brien, and John Dillon

and a great many minor men of more thunderous vociferousness, a long line of unnecessary heralds of the day of deliverance. . . .

Now, of a sudden, was there much prate in every place of the Convention of Dungannon and the Volunteers who had won the Parliament of 1782. There was much searching of the memory for almost forgotten facts of history and on the street of Ballycullen of an evening might be heard character sketches of such strongly similar and strongly contrasted patriots as Henry Grattan and Meagher of the Sword, Wolfe Tone and Dan O'Connell. There seemed to be a general upspringing of martial ardour and Ballycullen was making its soul in preparation.

Kevin Shanaghan often came into the shop where Michael worked during these days. He had a hunted, almost fearful look, and there seemed an immense eagerness upon him to be drunk. He expressed his sense of disgust rather well and it was remarkable that he should be driven to express himself so forcibly at this beyond any other time:

"The Lord knows but it gives me a kind of sickness in the very bowels when I have to listen to now in this God damned place! It was hard enough to have to listen to them always, but it's something hellish to hear them talking of dying for Ireland! "

Michael was not able to bestow upon this sad man even his accustomed amount of compassion. He, too, was excited more and more as day succeeded day, angry, puzzled, and doubtful in a way he had not hitherto known. Although the pure gold of its essence still shone through Sinn Fein yet did its outward, combative life seem to be struggling within the shadow of a mighty impulse which was gradually shaping all things to its need.

Not one seemed able to think of anything but the Volunteers — “Volunteers to have and to hold our newly-won liberties;” “Soldiers of Erin;” “Gallant Defenders of our Faith and Fatherland.” Such well-worn phrases and old sayings abounded in the great speeches now holding the country spell-bound.

Often now in the vacant moments of the shop his mind almost pained him in his attempts to find answers for wild questions. . . . Could it really be that the Dawn was come, having chosen thus to manifest itself in places like Ballycul-len? . . . The young farmers and graziers who had been accustomed to come into the shop with their sticks held horizontally under their arms, a great doggedness in every movement of their minds and bodies, now walked about excitedly whenever they came in with the very same

sticks held against their shoulders in imitation of rifles.

The Sergeant came often to declare that he'd think nothing, so he wouldn't, of throwing down his arms and of taking up others in defence of old Ireland against Carson and his mob. Ambrose Donohue was already beginning to take advantage of the military situation by sawing wooden guns out of suitable timber.

There was a further and more intense aspect becoming increasingly manifest. There was more fierce drinking in an endeavour to catch the spirit, it would seem, which men would soon be needing to meet and conquer their enemies in battle. . . . And there was never an angry word against England. England was anxious to do the right thing at last only for this murdering crew in Belfast that was thinking of rising out, in fact, telling the world loudly that they were going to rise out to keep the rest of Ireland from its due. . . . In the evenings motors would be stopping by the door and, evidently mistaking the shop for a pub, young louts of prosperous farmers would be staggering in looking for drink and cursing Carson. Carson was now cursed in Ballycullen with a vehemence comparative only to the cursing of his Holiness the Pope in Portadown.

Michael was often almost driven madly to give out his opinion by some of the things he was com-

pelled to see and hear. . . . But for the love of God or Ireland he remained silent and besides *Sinn Fein* seemed to have grown so silent now. . . .

“ I’d like to get a red-hot poker —” a patriot of Ballycullen would often begin only to have his expression of longing immediately drowned by a wild, drunken chorus of ferocious desire with regard to Carson. . . .

CHAPTER X

A GREAT MEETING

THE bright June day was heavy with the hum of martial music, very badly played indeed, yet noisy and stirring. Down all the four roads into Ballycullen the people came like armies in the sun. The gold upon the green banners, although tarnished through age and rough usage, now struggled into its share of brightness and crude glory. As the music came into Ballycullen it approached nearer the quality of harmony. The street was plentifully bedecked with laurel and other green stuff. There were triumphant arches across the street, all covered with crooked letters crowding out at the ends, which had been painted by Ambrose Donohue. "God Save Ireland!" "Cead Mile Failte!" "Ireland, Boys, Hurrah!" "Down with Carson!" Triumphant arches, but in celebration of what triumph? The head of Michael was deeply puzzled as he tried to find an answer.

There were moments when he thought that the connection of his country with England was a

vague, meaningless, almost imaginary thing, as vague and meaningless perhaps as the symbols set up so often to celebrate an imaginary separation. A very momentous thing had just happened. A few British Officers at the Curragh had mutinied in religious obedience, it would seem, to Ulster's threat of rebellion. This extraordinary event had inflamed the mind of Ireland in a way that was curiously contradictory to traditional sentiment. . . . Was it not really in keeping with the old, heroic rebel traditions and rather something to be proud of that, at long last, even a section of Irishmen in the British Army had refused point blank to advance savagely upon another section of Irishmen? Yet for all the way in which it really should be regarded this thing had made Ireland very mad indeed. What was happening here was but one shout of the great collective shout which was being performed this day all over Ireland. This tremendous answer stood everywhere for a tumultuous coming and going as if of an army with banners. . . .

"I declare to Christ, but this is the greatest day ever seen in Ballycullen!" said an ancient man in the hearing of Michael, just as the speakers seemed to float onto the platform upon the highest wave of enthusiasm. The chair was taken, as a matter of course, by Thomas Cooney who was the ex-officio chairman of all meetings

held in Ballycullen. People often said that where in the world could such a chairman be found as Thomas Cooney? Gilbert McCormack moved nervously beside him as if anxious for and feeling entitled to some distinction as his father's son, yet meek and deferential in the presence of the power and popularity of Thomas Cooney. Ambrose Donohue was prominent, also, in a green "God Save Ireland" hat and a big green tie. He was anxious for the success of the meeting, as he had hammered the platform together, and had not yet been paid for the work. But, of course, there would be subscriptions towards a fund at the end. It was quite impossible to think of a public meeting without this natural conclusion.

Michael caught a glimpse of Mirandolina, also, on the outskirts of the crowd with a little cluster of girls. She was wearing a pretty summer dress and a white hat with a broad green ribbon around it. Her eyes seemed strained to catch some meaning from the scene as soon her ears must be strained to catch some meaning from the flood of words. If only he and she were talking now, he might be able to explain or at least to give her his opinion upon the whole performance.

Connor Carberry was on the platform, too, although not prominent as a speaker, but his look was strained into a mixture of adoration and admiration upon the flag. . . . His eyes were

running water and his mouth was dribbling like the mouth of a young child. . . . His mind would seem to be folding and unfolding itself in the madness of his dream as the flag fell and fluttered and floated smoothly again upon the soft summer breeze. . . .

Distantly, upon the further outskirts of the crowd, and appearing almost as an essential fixture of Whelehan's public-house, stood Kevin Shanaghan, with the same decaying, almost obscene face, wearing the same smile as if he were laughing at all this with a suppressed, continuous chuckle in the very middle of his mind. It might be that all this invasion of Ballycullen "played into his barrow," as he was fond of saying with sarcastic use of the slang of Ballycullen. The Sergeant always kept a vigilant eye on him on Sundays to prevent him effecting a breach of the Licensing Act, but, to-day there would be a laxity of vigilance in this direction. There would be opportunities and flows of drink and he would at least win the means of forgetting the scene which Ballycullen, out of his abysmal possibilities, was now forcing him to witness. . . .

The Sergeant himself was sweating under his spiked helmet, that monstrous full-dress headgear of the Royal Irish Constabulary. His agony was neither so complete nor exquisite as usual, for he had a certain sympathy with the object of this

patriotic National meeting. His powerful allegiance to his sovereign Lord the King had suddenly become watered down and beneath the deceptive hide of his dark green uniform an Irish heart was beating. He was always against these cursed Orangemen, anyway. His goings to Belfast for special duty on "The Twelfth" had always appeared as departures for "The Front" away from his wife and family, never knowing what trip might be his last with a belt of a bottle from a dirty savage of an Orangeman in Sandy Row. . . .

But already Thomas Cooney had got on a good way with his speech. He had got so far as to affirm the ancient fact that he was standing there like all the good and true Irishmen around him in sacred defence of the ancient, indefeasible rights of the Irish people.

"We won't be tramped on any longer, so we won't." (Cheers.) Now that we were just in the last stages of the age-long fight. (Cheers). When the ship was at the harbour's mouth as you might say, in the words of the greatest Irishman, or as I might say the greatest patriot, of all the time, our own true and gallant leader. (Loud and prolonged cheering; shouts of "Up Redmond!" "To Hell with Carson!") A clear clarion call has been sounded to the young men of Ireland, which, of course, includes the young men of Ballycullen. And it is to see, I say it is to see that we hold fast

to the prize at last given us by England. Given us, moryah, aye when it was absolutely beaten out of them by the great statesmanship of our renowned leader and the squeeze he gave them in the hollow of his hand. (Tremendous cheering and shouts of "More power there, Thomas!") And let it go forth from this mighty assemblage of all creeds and classes which is to be compared only with the mighty gathering of our forefathers on the renowned Hill of Tara in the days of yore. (Cheers.) And at this crisis, as I might say in our beloved country, Ireland's fate, the men of Ballycullen will be found, as they have always been found, in their accustomed place leading the van. I have little more to say in conclusion, fellow countrymen, only "God Save Ireland!" (Loud and vociferous applause.) The continuous applause seemed to echo and re-echo for such a long time that it had the effect of also announcing the fact that Marcus Flynn had come to the front of the platform and was speaking, at least he was gesticulating eloquently in pantomime. The shouting died suddenly and in the wide stillness of the pause, by an unlucky accident, Marcus should be just letting the words, "I'm not much of a speaker!" out of his mouth. There was a loud laugh, which seemed to break blessedly upon the ears of Michael, because of the sudden comedy it gave the scene and upon the ears of Kevin

Shanaghan, too, he thought, because of the sympathy there was between them. . . . That vague man still stood afar off. . . .

The loud laugh, which went on exploding successively for a while, appeared to nettle Marcus a little, but he could not be thus suddenly silenced, for to-day his mind was working nimbly because he had taken a large dose of whiskey to fortify himself for the ordeal. He was spitefully conscious of the fact that he could not manufacture a speech with the ease and precision of Thomas Cooney, business rival and long established enemy in many ways as he was and to-day it was urgently incumbent upon him for commercial and social reasons to create a great impression upon public opinion. Already he had thought out his plan over a whiskey bottle in the parlour:

“I’m not much of an orator, fellow-countrymen,” he continued, “but I second every single word that my eloquent friend (there was a suppressed laugh at this), Mr. Cooney has said, and there!”

He turned around suddenly and grasping the hand of Thomas Cooney shook it with such warmth as nearly threw the late speaker out of his standing. It was a tremendous anticlimax, for the eloquent gombeen-man had built upon his well rehearsed speech to completely knock the devil out of Marcus Flynn, who had

not a word to throw to a dog in private, not to mention in public, on a great occasion like the present. He was flabbergasted but what could he do but return the magnanimous hand-shake there in the full gaze of the now fiercely enthusiastic throng. . . . On the part of Marcus it had been a ruse most subtly instinctive of the political showman, but good whiskey was often a great help to a man in a tricky situation. . . .

The crowd was now absolutely mad. To see two ancient enemies shaking hands like that! Why, it was a tremendous act, almost as great in their eyes as if, at the present juncture, in agreement upon some brilliant plan to settle the Irish question at last and end for ever all the different forms of English political trickery, Sir Edward Carson had suddenly shaken the hand of John Redmond before the gaze of a wondering world. . . . Thus in the bewildering moment of its happening did it appear as the greatest thing that had ever been done in Ballycullen and what way could anyone feel after the like of that only all for Ireland? . . . United we stand, divided we fall! . . . That's what would settle Carson! The drummers hit the drums with their fists and a few fifes were blown as if to further emphasise the fact and the glory of the incident, making it one that should not soon fade from the memory of Ballycullen. . . .

Gilbert McCormack seemed to think better of it at the last moment and did not come forward to stutter his usual few words, but a lone voice full of forced enthusiasm shouted:

“ Three cheers for the son of Hugh O’Donnell McCormack, the man that follied Parnell! ”

The few poor cheers which followed were rather for Parnell and his memory than for Gilbert McCormack and the memory of his father. But these trailed away very timidly, those who had given them utterance becoming suddenly ashamed that other people present might think they were cheering Gilbert McCormack himself. Besides, there was a shrewd suspicion in not a few minds that this shout had been hired for the occasion.

Nor did Ambrose Donohue venture a speech. It was his policy of the moment to flatter, by his silence, those who thought that they could speak. He had his eye on the job of secretary or treasurer of what might result from this meeting. In either capacity he might be able to manage an odd little slice of the fund. And, of course, there would be a fund. He knew well that there would be a fund.

A young man just arrived by motor from Dublin now made a dramatic appearance at the front of the platform. To the eyes of Michael the whole scene seemed to stagger loutishly away

from the sudden splendour of this young man's words. . . . He had not caught his name as he was being introduced to the meeting. Someone beside him now asked someone else:

"Who's that fellow, anyway? Begad he can speak, not like the lot of stuttering idiots we're after listening to?"

"Be hell, they say that's Shaun McDermott from Dublin."

That name, linked with the wild, sweet words, which were falling as if to cleanse Ballycullen like the way a dusty place is made bright again by summer rain, brought Michael to greater attention. He knew this man to be one of the gallant little band that had raised up in him the flame which had been hidden, almost quenched, here. . . . He remembered, with a sense of atonement in the very thought, that, for the moment they had come down from their lofty places in order to teach all the futile, anxious, puzzled men the way to love their country. Perhaps Shaun McDermott would tell Ballycullen what he himself had been afraid to tell it. They might listen to a man from Dublin but not to him. . . .

A finer enthusiasm seemed to have come upon them already and there was no playing for applause in the speech of this young, handsome man, who had filled his gentle heart with the pure passion of his ideal, only a quiet, continuous per-

suasive flow of great words spoken almost in gladness. . . . Michael had already forgotten that he was still in Ballycullen. He seemed to be standing in the very middle of Ireland and within sound of the strong chains clanking madly to the moment of release, while all around him were men flashed suddenly into worthy comradeship with those who had died for Ireland. . . . This surely appeared as the moment for which, through all the weary years of Ballycullen, he had been preparing his heart. . . .

He did not suddenly become aware that they were beckoning to him from the platform. . . . Why, of course, there was nothing wrong with the platform now, so he ran up amongst them joyfully.

"We're just having a little preliminary confab here among ourselves," said Ambrose Donohue. "You know, of course, that there'll have to be a little fund. It's a bit late in the year for dances, but you could pull a big crowd with a patriotic play, now that we're all in the game for Ireland as you might say. We were just thinking that you're the very man in the gap. 'Robert Emmet' again, you know! We might run it for three or four nights on the strength of the present enthusiasm and make a hat-full of money!"

"The very thing! The very thing!" stutted Gilbert McCormack. "We'll all have to

let bygones be bygones now. It's everyman's cause, for it's the common danger, so it is, and we must all be united! "

Thomas Cooney leaned across the table from his proud place in the chair and, catching Michael's hand in his which was almost limp with the excitement of the moment, whispered tensely:

" Good man, Michael! Good gossoon! I know you won't fail us! "

Marcus Flynn said thickly, drunkenly, yet proudly and possessively:

" Fail the devil! Isn't he my man? Amn't I paying him and keeping the roof over his mother's and sister's heads. And if he's not a hell of a lot in the shop, he's a damned fine actor! "

But Michael in this moment needed neither urging nor coaxing nor threatening. The man who had thrilled him to the very soul was still speaking and the words of the others came to him as if through a golden, auricular haze. He merely whispered " Certainly! " He did not hear the immense sigh of relief which the others heaved nor did he realise at all the commitment of himself that he had made. . . . He saw only Connor Carberry looking up at the flag with the tears streaming down his face. . . . Kevin Shanaghan had vanished, even as a dim speck from his consciousness, having doubtless de-

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scended upon Whelehan's public house at the highest moment of excitement. . . . The green band of her hat flashing suddenly bright across his vision and his mind did not cause him to remember that he had put himself in the way of meeting and speaking with Mirandolina again.

. . .

The meeting was at an end, having become so beautiful an atonement for itself in its concluding stages. He was honoured to find himself shaking hands with the man who had just spoken so finely. The bands were drumming up again for a triumphant march past and the great meeting of Ballycullen in June, 1914, was at an end.

CHAPTER XI

ASPECTS OF IRISH SOLDIERING

BELTS and bandoliers. We'll have to get belts and bandoliers! "

"And caps! "

"Aye, and caps," the other would affirm, although he evidently gave first place to belts and bandoliers in the military scheme.

A man thus fully equipped with belt, bandolier and wooden gun had something like the halo of a crusader shining around him. The conception of knighthood and fair women had somehow struggled into Ballycullen. Those who carried wooden guns in public boasted in private that they had plenty of "the stuff" hidden in safe places. "The stuff" included everything in the shape of guns and ammunition, from blunderbusses to sixteen-chambered revolvers of the most approved and deadly pattern. Groups of conspirators gathered nightly in the pubs to discuss these things in hushed, fierce tones. . . . It was damnable to think of this happening after so many years, their being called upon to die for

Ireland, but a branch of the Irish National Volunteers had been established in Ballycullen and it must be done. . . . On drill nights the countryside would be emptied of its youth and all would be congregated in one of the darkest places in the parish forming fours under the direction of an ex-soldier who had "gone through it" with Lord Roberts in Afghanistan. The life had been almost hammered out of him by discipline, but now he was having some sort of revenge for the wasted years of his slavery through the insolent blasphemy with which he shouted his commands at even the sons of strong farmers. He was "mad drunk" every night, for he had to be paid always before he could be induced to make a start out to the drilling place from either Cooney's or Whelehan's. He behaved continually as he had seen fierce, drunken Colonels behave.

The convention of meeting in a lonely place would seem to have been revived to most subtly induce the ancient spirit. Yet they appeared heavily chained at every turn, even by their own melodramatic patriotism, which was part of the effort before the world to prove the sincerity of their ambitions, their struggles and their hopes to escape from bondage. Hence all the secrecy of their meetings appeared unnecessary when one thought of the loud openness with which they spoke of "the stuff" in the dark "pubs" of

Ballycullen. But there was an amount of what one might call "feeling" become manifest. Back into many minds from which all glad thoughts of love and death had been blotted by the drifting years were struggling verses of Leo Casey's Fenian song:

Down beside the singing river
That dark mass of men were seen;
Far above their shining weapons
Hung their own beloved green.

By such means were they forcing their minds to believe that they were doing a noble and a Fenian thing, while there was not a gombeenman or a Cromwellian descendant of the parish but had already subscribed to the fund to buy belts and bandoliers and wooden guns. . . . The list of subscriptions was headed on the one hand by Thomas Cooney and Marcus Flynn, and on the other by Captain Beaumont Fortescue and the Hon. Herbert Fitzherbert. In fact, so great was the enthusiasm for the Volunteers amongst all the local gentry that Captain Beaumont Fortescue, who had distinguished himself in various expeditions against Zulus and other inferior peoples, had promised to review the troops in Mullaghownen at an early date. The remarkable condescension and decency of this proceeding were enthused over both at the drill meeting and at the

pubs. But extraordinary things were happening every day. New political talent was being forced to the front in the most amazing way, efficiency in military knowledge being the only thing apparently necessary. A man who had spent a short time as a carpenter in Aldershot had been elected Captain of the Ballycullen Volunteers solely on account of his military experience. Another man with his eye on political advancement at any cost had become "President of the Volunteers," a curious political position in a military organization.

At the meeting for the election of officers Michael's name had not been selected. There were two reasons for this. In the first place, even in spite of the enthusiasm he had shown for the Volunteers, since the day of the great meeting there had sprung up a certain amount of "feeling" against him because he had openly expressed himself as being in favour of Carson. At least he had frequently said in the shop that Carson should be thanked for being the means of putting into their hands a great possibility. It had already begun to be whispered around that he would probably be put out of the Volunteers for this, but he was tolerated for the time being because he was "getting up" the crowd again to make funds for the purchase of more belts and bandoliers and wooden guns. Besides, as he was

being so completely used for this purpose, he could not spare the time necessary for "officering." The fact helped to prolong his enthusiasm which might have waned slightly had it been brought into too continuous contact with the Volunteers. His evening occupation in striving to bring to life the words and thoughts of Robert Emmet still kept alive in his heart that part of his dream which the hope of the Volunteers had lit brightly. It was not his nature either to seek petty exaltation, so in any case they might have spared themselves the trouble of snubbing him. But he would show them again what he could do upon the stage. He would flash back the military ardour that had been raised up in them. They would be forced to accept him, as it were, through power of his own inherent ability. Maybe he would speak yet to great gatherings of men of his own country sufficiently purified to drink to its full glory in the spirit of Emmet and Tone and Davis and Mitchel. . . . Mirandolina was very near him again and although they were all three rehearsing in the same room of an evening Ambrose Donohue made no further attempts to cut him out of her regard. Ambrose wanted the concert to be a huge success because he was Secretary of the Fund. Mirandolina went rather shyly about the business of rehearsal, yet with a certain balance of assurance well maintained between the two men

as if nothing at all had happened between the three of them. They had been recalled to this work at the bidding of Ireland, and so all personal thoughts being driven away for the moment by the urgent, all embracing love of Ireland, they were as happy as three enthusiastic Socialists in their dream of the perfectly ordered world in the coming time.

The situation of Michael and Mirandolina in relation to one another and to Ireland and Ballycullen and the stage and Romance had been taken up by both just at the point where they had thought well to move away from it for a little while. Its old rich hue was upon the enthusiasm of Michael, and at no behest of common sense would or could he have kept from doing this thing now. Mirandolina had returned to her place in his dream just as all other things seemed to fall naturally as pieces of circumstance into their places in the mosaic of his life. Of course he did not take any walks with her down the old ivy-hung pathway now, for all had more anxiety presently than would permit them to find pleasure in the like of this. Besides, there would be no nights now at midsummer, no fragrant darkness to curtain them from prying eyes, and in addition there were men always hurrying along the road on Volunteer business at every blessed hour of the evening. But, after the rehearsals in the hall, the

talk would ever turn upon Ireland, Michael freely pouring out as a poet might his poems for love of some beautiful woman, all the history and tradition of Ireland which he had learned, and Ambrose Donohue getting him to repeat bits over and over again so that he might have them quite pat to repeat towards his own advantage in pubs or places where Michael was not likely to go, for the intellectual and patriotic benefit of newly arisen fops of farmers who had not a word of Irish history in their heads although a lot of money had been wasted on them at expensive colleges. It was very fashionable at the moment to be patriotic, and this man, who could adjust himself to every whim of the public taste in Ballycullen with the slippery elasticity of an eel, had given up retailing doubtful jokes from "The Winning Post" and "London Opinion" to talk feelingly about semi-obscure patriots like Terence Bellow McManus and Peter O'Neill Crowley.

There were times now when Michael almost appeared a veritable madman, so remote from reality would he be, not seeming to be living in Ballycullen or any place near it at all. . . . Mirandolina liked to hear him talking, for it lifted her and him beyond this mean place, but she being only a woman, and so constantly nearer the cruel reality of things, never seemed to forget

that this man who was fondly mirrored in her heart was only a poor, half-cowed spirit after all, doomed to suffer here in Ballycullen. And so it was that often as he would be setting about some of the grandest flights of his dream-lit imagination, she would look at him in a curious, quizzical way, as if she truly pitied him for his foolishness, a great, big silly baby, as he seemed to her, who had not yet learned to look out upon the world through the eyes of the life he knew. She often felt as if she would like to give him a really good shaking into common sense. Of course, it was the sudden twist towards patriotism pure and simple of Ballycullen that had put her also in this play, but it was Michael who seemed to be primarily responsible, for he would be always talking like a fool about Ireland.

In the drapery department of Thomas Cooney's establishment she did not come greatly into contact with the all absorbing activity of the moment. Excepting that Ambrose Donohue sometimes came into the shop to buy calico for arches and flags, and even elderly married women would come to ask her assistance in deploring the woeful foolishness that had suddenly taken possession of their men. Not a word of scornful criticism was ever passed upon the dramatic class, for did it not flourish under the very respectable wing of Thomas Cooney? Even on Sundays Michael was

kept very busy around the club looking after scenery and other things. It was impossible for him at present to indulge his fancy in the spectacle of a field day of the Ballycullen Volunteers.

On the Sunday before the Concert, as he stood upon the steps talking to a few others, the approaching music of the small band told him that the Volunteers were at last and for the first time concentrating upon Ballycullen. To him it was a glad fact, a magical, coloured sound as if out of some of the brightest pages of Ireland's history that were being lived over again. To him it was this surely, although just now, even in this intense moment, he became conscious of the old sad smile upon the face of Kevin Shanaghan even though it was Sunday and his rags seemed dirtier than ever and the soles of his boots were bound to his feet by bits of twine. . . . Michael wondered what in the world the smile could be for. So far he had not been given the opportunity of discovering what the opinion of Kevin was in regard to the Volunteers, but it did not seem likely that the silent, enigmatic man would venture an opinion although he might smile. . . . The Volunteers were coming nearer, and as the music suddenly seemed to fill with wonder the lovely day all the thoughts that Michael had ever had about Ireland came thronging gladly back into his mind.

He thought that all the valiant heroes of the Gael were commingled with the Volunteers as they swept past, Owen Roe O'Neill and Sarsfield, Wolfe Tone, Michael Dwyer, John Mitchel. . . . Again had his dream blinded him, and he did not see the reality of Ballycullen in the shining multitude that went marching by. There was only one face that touched him, and this was the face of Connor Carberry, who carried the flag. The long, lean gnarled hands, that had been worn in jail and in Australia, were firmly clasped upon the staff above his head and his eyes, lifted up to look upon the flag, had something heavenward also in their gaze. In the impassioned moment he appeared almost like a holy man of God. As the procession approached and passed, Michael saw him most clearly as a figure of his dream. He did not see the motley crowd in all its queer equipment, some only with caps; others with Boer, or what were still known as "God save Ireland" hats of dark green, with a celluloid photo button of John Redmond attaching the leaf to the crown; some with belts only, some with bandoliers only, others with both and a wooden gun as well. There were some who preserved a stage of Irish militarism in the blackthorns which they carried, and a few courageous souls of Land League traditions carried muzzle loading shot-guns. Immensely brave, indeed, these felt themselves to be, seeing

that they had to pass the barracks, and, for all his talk of being a patriot now, the sergeant was a hidden scoundrel. No, not these. Connor Carberry was not walking by the side of them. . . .

In a continuous, single file, and moving as an accompanying column, were the officers and officials of the Volunteers. . . . Very proudly came the President, the Colonel, the Treasurer, the Captain, the Secretary, the Quartermaster sergeant, numerous lieutenants, sergeants, corporals, etc. The number of officers, commissioned and non-commissioned, almost exceeded the number of men. Experts in public life, who always managed somehow to edge into the uppermost politics of the moment, were very prominent. . . . Michael did not suddenly realise as part of his perception that they had been halted just outside Thomas Cooney's public house for "refreshments," a term vaguely indicative of the fact that they were going in to drink pints at their own expense and merely as a considerable increase to his custom for Thomas Cooney. The broad smile which flittered into the consciousness of Michael from a flash, as it were, across the face of Kevin Shanaghan was as the accompaniment of words which rang unspoken on his ear:

"Well, thanks be to God that there's always something that gives a fellow the chance of a drink even on Sunday. Isn't it a great move

entirely to have the publicans at the head of the Volunteers? Now, out on a route march, for instance, sure the lads can be halted turn about outside of all the true patriotic pubs in the country. Whenever, also, there is a field day, so to speak, in Ballycullen, for the lads in Ballyscallan it is only natural to think that the visiting Volunteers 'll give their custom for their porter only to such as are tried and true friends of The Cause, and *vice versa* when the boys from Ballycullen go over to visit Ballyscallan."

And this surely was the graphic impression which was flaming up in the still unbroken mind of Kevin Shanaghan while Michael Dempsey was about to rehearse his players in the trial scene of Robert Emmet for its second production in Ballycullen. Thomas Cooney was filling out the porter for his numerous new customers. And who could say that the people were not coming to the front at last, for to-day never a peeler was barking, so to speak, as Thomas said, in Ballycullen.

CHAPTER XII

MICHAEL'S DREAM

THE days and nights now whirled with what seemed but one meaning towards the night of the concert. Several tickets had been sold for every available seat and the hall was packed to suffocation on this summer night. What with the heat of the night and of the densely packed house there was a certain weariness upon Michael so that he felt that for him at least the greater part of the performance must be in pantomime above the sound of a drunken conversation and lewd jokes and scintillant sparkles of saliva, which would intermittently introduce the quality of light into the thick air. . . . Somebody had already said that it was an unnatural thing to have a concert in Ballycullen in the summer. It was something worse. It was almost obscene. . . . But some kind of show would have to be made by the performers of the evening. The players, male and female, were already perspiring in the dressing-rooms before they went out upon the stage at all. . . .

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Michael did not feel the old pride in his Robert Emmet costume and he thought as he looked upon her that Mirandolina appeared sickly in the mixture of daylight and candle-light. Outside, continuously, could be heard the wild sounds of Volunteers arriving from all parts of the country. The street was already thronged with men unable to gain admission. They were turning back and gaining admission to the pubs instead. All the pubs were crowded and around the hall was no sign of Thomas Cooney, or Whelehan, or Nugent, or Phillips, or Brannagan. This was a remarkable night of their lives, and they were all doing well.

Michael went out before the other players and took a look at the audience through a hole in the drop curtain. All the faces seemed commingled queerly into one great, leering sweating face. Here and there were individual touches which distinguished its color and quality. A huge hulk of a Volunteer in his belt and bandolier and cap, his moustache waxed military fashion, sat by the side of his sweetheart, a servant girl, and from staring fixedly upon the stage would turn in odd moments to gaze upon her foolishly in strong, agricultural rapture. . . . Later, she would be leaning upon his shoulder as he told her what he would do, so powerful was the spirit which had been raised up in him presently. And so in

its immediate effects this old passion play of Ireland at this production was no different in its results from what it had been always. Yet was there something different in the constitution of the audience. Here, suffering for their country for the first time in their lives, were fellows with weak, effeminate faces and "swanky" clothes, shop-boys from Castleconner or Mullaghowen, and exclusive Gaels who aspired in imitation of St. John Marlowe, the ladies' man who drove with Mr. Alexander Waddell up through Ballycullen every Friday. All Colonels or Captains or Majors of local corps of Volunteers, they felt somehow as if they were expected to put in an appearance. . . .

Soon, however, just as soon as the damned thing started, they would have managed to escape into the air and would be handing one another half-pints of whiskey outside the door, or else trying to "pick-up" girls of Ballycullen as they rushed almost fainting out of the hall a little later on. . . . Perhaps because the remainder of the hall appeared so densely crowded, Michael noticed particularly six empty chairs in the front row covered with green cloth and looking very like reserved seats for notable people. . . . Somebody just beside him, and looking also through the curtain, remarked that these seats were reserved for Captain Beaumont Fortescue

and the Hon. Herbert Fitzherbert and their ladies. . . . Of course these had bought tickets but this was not sufficient to make certain the fact that they would come here. Yet this ostentatious emptiness had been arranged in their honor just as their horses might be led after the gun carriage were they being given a military funeral by the great Empire they had served so well. Some of their labourers were here to-night and they would be glad to hear from them to-morrow of this mark of respect to the "nobs." It might mean a further subscription to the Fund.

There did not seem to be any use in waiting further for more people to crowd into this suffocating place. But there was an urgent reason for delay. Ambrose Donohue had not yet arrived from Dublin on the recently purchased second-hand motor bicycle which his secretaryship of the Volunteers had brought him. . . .

But just now, of a sudden, the noise of his two-stroke engine could be heard, the hum rising gradually higher, like the approach of a great bee, until Ambrose at last jumped off just outside the door and came into the dressing-room. He was hot and dusty and excited, and partly drunk.

"Oh listen, d'ye know what's after happening in Dublin to-day?"

They crowded around him to hear the news. He began to tell them what might appear through

his excitement, half truth, half fantastic rumour, as a description, of what might result as an epoch-making event. How there had been a great landing of guns at Howth to-day as the Nationalist counterblast to what had happened in Larne. That the military had been called out against them and how the Volunteers had fought to the last man. There had been a great battle all along the sea road from Howth and a regular massacre at Bachelor's Walk. But, thanks be to God was the prayer of everyone in Dublin, that the guns were safe.

"Isn't it bloody awful?" said even Ambrose, stung to this expression of his patriotism, "that Carson wasn't interfered with, but now d'ye see that the dirty Scottish Borderers didn't forget to shoot when it was us that was in it. By God, it's not fair!"

It took a little time for Michael to realize the news, and when at last he did, it was just before he went out upon the stage to play the part of Robert Emmet. There came a passionate twitching into the muscles of his face and a new splendour into his words. . . . There seemed to be a great gladness upon him and a feeling that this was the sublime moment of his life. There was a hoarse cheer from the dense audience, which seemed to re-echo upon the street and far down into the very bowels of the pubs.

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It was like a sound of purpose against the flashing magic of this moment in Ireland. The wild cheers which echoed and re-echoed through Ballycullen as the play went on told the audience that the story of Robert Emmet and what had happened to him was nearer them than ever before by reason of what had just happened in Dublin. The British, the English, the Sassenach, the Government, or by whatever other name you wished to describe them, were still the same rotten scoundrels out of hell in spite of all their talk about Home Rule, and Asquith and the great British democracy. Groups were passing out of the hall every few minutes so that others might come in to see the play and so have the opportunity of cheering to their heart's content. On the whole it was the most awful orgy of patriotism ever seen in Ballycullen. The appeal of the passion play had been something to conjure with always, but now they were translated almost to the extent of being transferred back bodily into all the most glamorous periods of Irish history simultaneously, successively, inclusively. . . . In the oblivious moment of their madness they cheered Michael Dempsey as if he were no longer the shop-boy in Marcus Flynn's at all, but instead some new and inspired saviour of Ireland suddenly come amongst them for the first time. Yet the madness of Ballycullen was as nothing

beside the madness that was upon Michael Dempsey. He was tense, passionate, stricken white almost through his grease-paint. He saw, half comically, across the red smear of the night, even his master, Marcus Flynn, applauding him as he sat there immensely in one of the very front seats. It was the thing that summoned his mind to the final effort towards which it had been struggling. When the curtain had fallen upon the last act of the play he would speak to them in his own words, from his own heart and out of the hatred of England that he had fanned up around his soul in his lonely room in his mother's house. No one in the whole world knew how much that room of dreams meant to him, but to-night he would give them a taste of its splendour. . . .

The final curtain had fallen and he had stepped before the painted canvas. He saw only a lumpish, moving mass and a sickening sea of faces, and yet he was speaking, speaking with a wild vagueness out of the dream that had come to him. He did not see the wide, wide, sneer, nor all the shiny, dribbling smirk of derision that was upon every face. . . .

God knows, but wasn't it simply barbarous, the cheek of him! Wasn't it bad enough to have to listen to him going through his part without having to set up with this bloody dose? A Republic! That's what he was saying. Did anyone ever

hear such nonsense? God knows, but Home Rule was bad enough! Good God Almighty! did anyone ever hear such lunacy at this stage of the world's history? Wasn't it a wonder, now, that Marcus Flynn, a shrewd man, would keep an idiot like that in the house?

He did not hear the derisive whoops of "Good man there, Mickeen!" from the mob, or a loud, full-blooded "Yahoo!" at intervals. . . .

He became aware that someone was pulling him by the sleeve, whispering him with feverish anxiety to come off the stage. Then he returned to realisation as the curtain was lowered slowly before his eyes. He could not hear the roaring in the street nor the wild demoniac laugh of derision. . . . Then in a sudden instant he became Michael Dempsey again. . . . He saw Mirandolina Conway looking up tenderly into his eyes and heard her saying in tones of the strangest consideration:

"Oh, Michael, why ever in the name of goodness did you take that wretched whiskey? It has set you mad."

It was a peculiar instant of earthly consciousness when someone who might be said to be very fond of him was trying out of her pity and out of her love, perhaps, to find an earthly excuse for his sudden flight of madness. Drunkenness! It was a sufficiently reasonable supposition to believe

that he must be drunk, seeing that mostly all those around him were "blind to the world," and even Ambrose Donohue had been just barely sober enough to ride the motor-bike from Dublin. . . .

Mirandolina had always felt it was a thing greatly to Michael's credit that here in this demoralising atmosphere of Ballycullen he had held himself from drink.

And now it was hard to think that already the report was spreading broadcast that Michael Dempsey, like all the rest of the bucks connected with the Dramatic Class, had been the worse of drink at the concert, and that he had tried to make a speech and that he had gone on with the maddest kind of talk about a Republic and Rebelions and the Fenians and idioting of the sort that nobody minded these times.

The story about that this revival of *Robert Emmet*, having been the means of effecting a reconciliation between them had somehow got abroad and all kinds of women and children and others would be coming into the shop next day to sympathise with her and to suggest how very drunk Michael Dempsey had been. It would not seem to matter that mostly every crippled or able-bodied man in Ballycullen had been in the same state. The difference was, of course, that Michael Dempsey thought he was a great fellow and that they did not put up to be anything. And she

would be so deeply wounded by this, while he would not feel or know. . . .

Yet, why was she looking at him so sadly when he really felt himself to be more sane and sober than he had ever been? Why were all the others giving him such dark looks as they slipped out? Why was she leaving him, too, with such a poor "Good-night" only upon her lips? Oh, why was it at all, or was it merely because he had tried to tell them?

At last it came to him that he was alone in the dressing-room. He hurried on his clothes, for to-night it seemed that there was a tremendous urgency upon him to be thinking and it seemed that he could think along the line he wished only in the loneliness of his own room. . . . At the door two men were waiting to see him or speak to him as he went out. These were Connor Carberry and Kevin Shanaghan. The wild look upon the puzzled face of Connor seemed to grow more intense, and the wise, sad smile to deepen upon the face of Kevin Shanaghan. . . . That was all before they separated. It happened so quickly that it did not seem like a moment slung across his path by Fate. . . . It was a little strange to think that in the loftiest moment of his life those who had come to him were a drunkard and a madman. . . . Recollection did not suddenly spring as a comfort to tell that

King Lear had gone out to meet his end accompanied by a fool. But it would have been quite improper on the part of one so recently self-declared an Irish Republican, Lear having been described by Shakespeare as a British king.

There was upon him when he entered the little room a feeling of triumph such as he had never before known. This night his dream had been real, he had spoken out of all his lonely planning within these four walls. He had surprised Ballycullen. He supposed that they thought they knew him, the thing that stood up inside Marcus Flynn's counter every day, and that they had correctly fixed his possibilities in their continuous sneer. But now he was as one most subtly different from any estimate which might flow off common tongues. He went to a box, and with a certain air of reverence, which was upon him this evening in keeping, as it were, with his sudden grandeur, unlocked it. It was a goodly bundle of manuscript that he took out and placed upon the table in the circle of the lamplight. He locked the door and put the key in his pocket, an unnecessary precaution it might be, for there did not seem much risk of possible interruptions. Yet he went on almost to affect the gestures and whispering secrecy of one conspiring tremendously with himself. Then he opened the bundle of manuscript and gazed down at the plans. . . .

Here were all the maps and full particulars of the rising which he had spent long, sleepless nights in working towards perfection. . . . This was a better plan than Robert Emmet's. It was something that had come to him here in the dark and lonely moments of his brooding, through all the long time he had been engaged in reading the little papers and dwelling upon the history of Ireland. It was the light that had broken in upon his mind, his inspiration out of the far ways of the ancient Gaelic civilisation towards which his soul had been eternally groping, for it had appeared to him that the agony of Ireland must surely be lifted as by a miracle of God. . . . All down the ages there had been manifestations of the Holy Spirit through such lowly people as he was. And through the mouth of more than one prophet had Ireland been promised her freedom. . . . What if not the moving of some such impulse towards this end had caused him, Michael Dempsey, a shopboy who had not moved very far away from Ballycullen, and who had received only a very indifferent education, and who had fed his mind only on scraps of Irish history and mediocre journalism, who had scarcely seen a member of any military body in his life, with the possible exception of the peelers in Ballycullen marching down to the court two deep on the first of every month, to

think of this great thing? How had it been possible for him to contrive with such rich completeness the heap of plans upon the table? These were not the mere ravings upon paper of a disordered brain. On the contrary, they were orderly and thorough, and quite convincing. To a very encouraging degree the promise of success was upon them. It seemed impossible to imagine that there was further foreshadowing of a sudden disaster here. . . . So very convincing were they, indeed, that they would certainly fetch a good price in the hands of one who would be in direct succession from Dermot MacMurrough down through Leonard McNally to Richard Pigot. . . . His reading of Irish history had given him this warning, also, to be careful. . . . He must wait, however, and bear with it until the coming of other times and the rise of other men should naturally evoke his assistance. For a great while now it had been his fancy to think that all the circumstances of Ireland must naturally move to the moment from which he should emerge. It seemed to him to-night that the moment was rapidly approaching and it was because of what had happened in Dublin to-day and its connection with the things of his vision that he had spoken. . . . He hoped now, in an instant of stark sanity, that he had not gone too far. . . . No, it was the very fullness of his

heart that had saved him from himself. The very blindness and dumbness of passion that had come upon him towards the end of his speech, through the intensity of his love, had helped him to effect something like caution. . . . But maybe he had said sufficient to give them a glimpse of himself as he might be when Ireland should honour him as the man sprung so lowly at length attained to power through strength of a supreme love. . . . Through him it might be that the Queen, almost grown too sad and desolate to win a lover, might be fondled and kissed again towards a rarer beauty than her Dear Dark Head had ever known. . . .

CHAPTER XIII

1914

NEXT morning Michael stood behind the counter as usual. Marcus Flynn came into the shop looking rather seedy, as he had disposed of a good many half-pints to bring him through the ordeal of the previous night. He peered narrowly at Michael.

“You were in a grand condition last night,” he said. “But curse of hell on the same *Robert Emmet*, anyway, sure everyone in the whole place was rotten, and I suppose I’ll have to excuse you for this time.”

Having said this, Marcus went out of the shop and back into the parlour to enjoy himself. . . . So that was the construction already put upon it by his employer, and doubtless all Ballycullen was already saying the same thing — or worse. It was his immediate reward for speaking to them from his very heart. It was a straight and powerful blow, of the nature and significance which Ballycullen only could deal out of its malevolence and its perpetual satirical leer. His wandering,

affectionate mind, so warm always with his great love and sympathy, was frozen to the cold attention of realisation and to-day he saw his native village as he had already seen it many a time when his lonely love, struggling from his imprisoned heart had been defeated by some slashing and brutal blow leaping out suddenly with a certain treachery from the life of this place. To-day it was raining, too, and the muddy pools which sometimes gathered upon the earth of the street were the perfect mirror for Ballycullen. A relentless drizzle had been falling on to twelve o'clock, when the daily papers came in from Dublin. He was all eagerness to read the account of the Howth gun-running, but just at that moment it happened that numerous customers came into the shop, women exceedingly gabby over their small purchases, who even distracted Marcus from whatever he might be doing in the parlour to come in and have a look at them, a desolate and lugubrious expression upon his dark countenance. Then he went, finally it would appear, for a long, drunken day in the parlour, and the shop became vacant once more. . . .

At last Michael opened the paper and his mind seemed to but dimly comprehend the amazing news until his eyes fell upon the Bachelor's Walk portion of it—the massacre—and then his vision was blotted into a fierce, vengeful con-

sciousness. He seemed to remain staring out for a great while with a remarkable look of sadness in his eyes, such as the defeated protagonist might wear just before the fall of the final curtain in a tragedy. . . . It was scarcely the look of the victorious enthusiast thinking wildly out of his dream. But it was not a dream. His plan for a rising that could not possibly be defeated was a real thing, and this news of the day, too, was real and full of old truth, for it told of the ancient butchery of England. Maybe this would show the people of Ireland that they were not so far distant yet from what Cromwell had done in Wexford and Drogheda. His great plan, of course, was inclusive in such a calculation. The weak, yet insinuating foolishness about the overflowing, sympathetic breasts of the democracy of England had not deceived him. All his life he had been trying to tell them in Ballycullen the thing of which this was such a desperate and convincing proof, and they had not listened to him. The seed of his mind had been blown on the indifferent winds of Ballycullen to find no place of rooting in their hearts. It was only last night that he had tried to consolidate his message in flaming words. He had told them that they could never have anything or be anything until they had done with England and that any thought or endeavour built upon other foun-

dation was but vaporous folly and the dream of a dream. . . . He did not notice Marcus Flynn beside him, so stealthily had his master come. There was a little wicked glint in the gombeen-man's eye.

"Look here," he said, snapping the paper from Michael, "this is all bloody nonsense. A lot of mad headed idiots of fellows, maybe in the pay of the Government, getting up to go destroy Home Rule. And think of solid, respectable men like me that's after giving our lives to it, a laughing-stock in the country if we don't get it now. This is a most damnable business to go happen at present and we rising up like one man, so to speak, to finish Carson."

Michael said nothing, for this was the kind of talk to which he could never reply. Besides, to reply to Marcus might have been construed as a piece of impertinence, worthy the losing of his job. . . . Now Marcus spoke fiercely. The derision of Ballycullen to its uttermost was in the diminution of Michael's name:

"I say, will you listen to me, Mickeen! I made a man of you, so I did, and if you don't keep your powder dry it'll be the gutter for you again. It's your mother and sister you have to think most of and not Ireland, so I'd advise you not to be drinking. I have my good name and the good name of my shop to keep up, so I have, and

it doesn't look well. Ireland is in the proper hands to-day. The man who stops the onward march of the nation to the old House in College Green is a traitor to his country. Anything that takes the mind of the country off Home Rule is a sin, so it is, and plays right in to the Orange camp. This wild talk about fighting for the freedom of Ireland is all as I roved out. Carson doesn't mean to fight, nor we don't mean to fight, but we want him to think we are, while his whole game is to keep us from thinking that he's not. I'm after reading about the Howth business. Well, wasn't it all the fault of them lunatics in Dublin? Dublin was never right nor proper since that cursed Larkin was allowed to set foot in it. All a bit of thickness and show-off this was, and so they provoked the soldiers to shoot, so they did. Why didn't they bring in the stuff in the dead of the night in a dark place, where in any event there could never be more than a few peelers, who could be bought with pints. No, of course, they had to show off. But they'll make a mistake if they think that is going to rouse the country, for I know Ireland at the present time. It's men like me with a stake in the country that's looking the proper way for Home Rule. But there was always a crowd in Ireland ready to lead the people on a wild goose chase and to spoil the game. I'm a patriot, Mickeen. You're only an idiot.

If you had any cutting in you at all you'd remember that Joe Devlin himself was a grocer's curate before The Cause made a man of him."

When he had said this he went out to march himself through Ballycullen, a successful moneyed man with a right to have an opinion of his own. It was his intention to put a stop to the talk of those who might be beginning to express sympathy with the lads that were after making fools of themselves. In spite of his befuddled condition it was the chilling common sense of Marcus' words which forced itself upon Michael and left him with not a little of the hope and purpose ebbed from his mind. . . .

The day's rain had now turned into a continuous downpour and soon men were coming into the village because they could not work in the fields, some merely to divert themselves in the pubs, others to get horses shod at the forge as well. Many topical remarks were passed in Marcus Flynn's shop, but the importance of the thing that had happened in Dublin was subjugated to the leer which all of them had on their faces for Michael.

"There'll be no marching to-night!" one would say to another with the most irritating insistence, "we're all tired after last night and everything. I wonder will we be supplied with boots out of the Funds of the organisation. It's all damned fine

to talk about giving us caps and belts and bandoliers that we wouldn't wear out in the course of our natural lives. But a new pair of boots lasts no time at the marching."

"It's only a kind of mug's game, anyway, this military business after a hard day's work when a fellow is fit for little more than lying at the back of a ditch to have a snore or a drink!"

The torture of this day for Michael superseded that of all his experience in Ballycullen. It was a continuous battle between the romantic notions of his mind and the hard facts of all this cruel realism. He listened in vain for some remark which might be in harmony with his burning sympathy. . . . To-night he would have to visit Connor Carberry, whose blood would be on fire because of what had happened in Dublin. . . . He knew that the old man would have been flashed into a full, blazing ecstasy by the news that men had not forgotten how to die for Ireland. . . .

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The first intimation of the Great European War broke quietly on Ballycullen. Always so intimately concerned with the small affairs of the village and the parish and their little selves, they did not perceive the full ghastly portent of the first flickers of the great calamity. Their sense of insularity was a distinguishing characteristic so

firmly rooted now in this particular year of Our Lord that it had almost sapped the natural feelings of human sympathy which should have struggled to life somehow, even in the Ireland of 1914. But the sin of pride which is the root of all unkindness and negation of humanity was already theirs. There was a mere unreasonable gladness upon Michael that England was going to war, this time against a powerful enemy, and not as of old, against the Boers or inferior races of Africa, or the East, or poor Ireland. He tried hard to do a little clear thinking, but his mind, at no time very supple along this line, did not suddenly move towards complete understanding, yet as the first days of the war passed into the beginning of the long, bloody encounters, he came to have a few hopes. Perhaps Ireland's great opportunity, his great opportunity, would come now, and of old he had learned that England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity, because the same idea was embodied in a phrase which jumped naked continually out of all the welter of speechmaking, and to-day it would seem that the world was beginning to be swayed altogether by wild, copy-book phrases of that kind.

It was curious to see now the attitude of the papers that had been most fiercely Nationalist. Michael recollected, not without some pain, that it had been different at the time of the Boer

war, which was now but a far, boyhood memory. He remembered how his father in those days, the concluding stages of his broken life, had been very fond of reading the papers to old Lem Broderick, the Fenian, the two men creating a kind of madness between them, like that of Connor Carberry, in the little, poor house, amid the mean dejected way in which they were driven to end their days. . . . It was still splendid to think of the attitude of the Irish newspapers in those days because the little heroic handful of Boers had afforded a parallel to the poor, down-trodden people of Ireland. The Irish members of Parliament just at this time were absolute rebels but the Land Bill of 1903 had not yet been passed. The Irish Brigade, under Colonel Lynch and Major MacBride, was fighting on the side of the Boers, and there were men from even Ballycullen fighting on the side of the English, and, strange to say, all were regarded equally as national heroes. The supreme narrowness of mind which had come to the Irish farmer with the passing of the Land Bill of 1903 had not yet corroded their hearts, although the change in them was imminent. Already the sympathies of Michael, working in unconscious harmony with the old memories, were drawing him into sympathy with the Germans, because, for a great while, surely, it had seemed that all

peoples, even a proud, iron people aiming towards world-power, might appear very poor and down-trodden and very meek and humble of heart beside the villainy and the might of England. . . . The food with which he had supported his mind had only built it immovable upon a sense of the past. Thus, had it appeared to him a traitorous, in fact an almost blasphemous thing, that Sir Edward Grey had given Mr. Asquith the opportunity of making the infamous speech in which he referred to Ireland as the "one bright spot." It seemed that this had been the way with him always. His mind was unable to grasp to its full extent and in all the variations of its possibilities the constant flux of the thing that wiser men called "the present."

Now, most of these reservists who had been prominent in drilling the Volunteers were being called to the colours. But no one thought of this immediately as a serious blow to the Organisation, seeing that all the national soldiers of Ireland, particularly those who made up the amazing battalions of officers, now considered themselves fully equipped and drilled, and did not want any impertinence from cheeky, drunken "bowsies," that used to be considered the scruff of the earth until their use had been found at the present juncture. But, continually this outlook was becoming changed, almost surprisingly in some of its aspects.

It would seem that even the Party had notions of going out to recruit. Some of the weightiest people in Ireland had already pronounced in favour of the justice of the Allies' cause. Numerous fine young men, who had been the pride of the Volunteers from their inception, were thinking of joining the army for the little while that the war would be on, a few months or so, and of "seeing a bit of life." Elderly men, too, were of a sudden showing surprising military ardour and in this connection it must be remembered that the ages of the Howth Volunteers had ranged from nine or ten years to the honourable, grey-haired condition of sixty-five years. It appeared to many that on the word of the almost almighty Mr. Redmond, a kind of Irish Territorial Force was to be organised "for the defense of the coasts," and many old men were delighted to think that here, surely, was an opportunity of respite from the long grind of their years. To defend the coasts—poor old fools! But their excuse lay in their longing for a soft job to afford them peace for a little while just before their end. To the flaming, angry mind of Michael it appeared that the last lingering embers of Fenianism had been finally quenched. Yet he went on to raise up his small, lonely voice in favour of the truth in these days, but they would not listen. . . . Why wasn't he backing the war now, and

he to be always on the side of everything new or mad? He was a quare idiot entirely.

"Are you not backing up the war, Mickeen?" said Marcus Flynn to him very morosely one morning.

"I don't believe in it. I don't consider that it is any of Ireland's business to go mad about it."

"And why the hell don't you? What am I paying you for only to believe in it? and in everything I say or do? It's a powerful and a just war and it is the clear duty of every Irishman living to go out and fight, and die, too, if needs be. What would happen a man like me, the backbone of the country, if we don't fight? The Germans coming in on top of us and taking everything we have. What would the like of you do then for employment? I'm after having serious complaints from big parishioners, people with a stake in the country, about the way you do be blathering, and they with enough worries on their minds already about the war. Look here, Mickeen, I'm after getting enough trouble from yourself and your opinions this while back and if you don't drop it you'll be mebbe left with nothing to do but join the very army that you're never done but running down. . . . And what would your mother and sister do then? Eh, Mickeen?"

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Before the end of the year men from Bally-

cullen, reservists who had been called up, were being killed in the war, and a recruiting meeting had been held in Ballycullen at which the principal speakers, after Captain Beaumont Fortescue and the Hon. Herbert Fitzherbert, had been Thomas Cooney and Marcus Flynn, with Ambrose Donohue very prominent on the business side. For the first time in his life this feeble, imitative opportunist had been permitted to rub shoulders with the gentry and in this achievement would seem to have reached the summit of his ambition. Although the proceedings were most enthusiastic, no one joined up. But the success of association to which he had attained, drove Ambrose Donohue to apply for a commission which was granted him a little later in the Army Service Corps. The British bent of his mind, his "shoneenism," had given him these convictions, of which this was a result, combined with the fact that he did not see much further possibilities in the Volunteers. . . . Although of course not to the full extent of joining it in a body, the collective mind of Ballycullen had moved towards the army and Ambrose, as always, had moved with it, thus helping still further to fix him as the popular young man that he was. Besides all these and other considerations a commission in the Army represented a jump at one bound into the very bosom of an exclusive set.

All his life he had been striving to ape distantly the very thing he would now be a part of in its essence and reality. . . . Besides he might get a fine job when the war was over. In fact it would appear that the war had been sent to make him, just as it had been sent to unmake the Ballycullen Volunteers. These had dwindled hopelessly. A rumour had gained currency that, in the event of a general call to military service, the Volunteers would be the very first to be taken. . . . Of course, they fully believed everything that was said in the Nationalist Press about it being right and just to go out to fight, but they did not believe that any such noble obligation should be extended to them. The last hope of being given the soft job of minding the coasts had, by this time, disappeared from the minds of the old men. The prospect of the war being extended to Ireland seemed to have vanished since the German fall-back from Paris had happened. The price of cattle had risen enormously and all anybody wanted was to be left alone to make money. The public opinion of the country seemed to be perilously suspended between support of those who went about recruiting with the intention of saving them from the Germans and of those who spoke against it, thereby demonstrating their intention of saving them from the dark conscriptionist intention of England with regard

to this country. Of course a "mouth" like Michael Dempsey did not matter either way. To begin with, he had no stake in the country, and, in the second place, he did not live in Dublin, from whence a dark wave of rebel oratory had begun to flow.

* * * * *

On the last night of 1914 Michael was standing desolately at the corner when he heard a faint drumming in the distance. It seemed like the approach of the Ballycullen Band coming in from the deserted drilling place of the Volunteers to ring out the old year, but it was a mean, feeble noise, which displayed great gaps in the music, almost an insult to the dying year, this poor flickering sound.

"The army is now concentrating upon Ballycullen," said a wag who propped the wall by the corner. But from the very moment of his momentous declaration, the sound seemed, unfortunately, to die further and further away, until at last it might be some very sad thing going out forever with the dying year. . . . And, in this moment it seemed that some part of Michael's soul had gone away forever, too, for there was a couple just passing now and he barely lifted his eyes to look at them, although they were two whom he knew very well, Second Lieutenant Ambrose Donohue and Mirandolina Conway, the girl he

had confused, in his love-thoughts of her and Ireland, with Sara Curran, when they had performed together in the play about Robert Emmet. It was queer to think now that the real Sara had married a British officer. . . . Anyhow, what matter? A man should have only one love, his girl or his country.

Ambrose Donohue looked remarkably spruce in his well-fitting uniform, while even the very pockets of his own poor suit were bulged and broken with books and papers about Ireland.

It seemed little wonder that Mirandolina had at last made her choice between them.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DARK YEARS

AS time drifted on more men from Ballycullen went into the army, driven there for the most part by the ruthless, economic reasons of the moment. Although Michael was intensely opposed to the ideal, or, perhaps absence of ideal, for which they stood, he could feel the pangs of their isolation when they came back from the fields of death to Ballycullen.

"Isn't this getting to be an awful bloody place?" he would often hear one say to another as they stood lonely by the corner. There they would be, strange aliens with frightened eyes, trying to express themselves in the jagged jargon of hell, which was their only acquisition from the Great War. . . . They, somehow, always appeared bedraggled and forlorn, all mud and blood as they came into Ballycullen and into the pubs. They might have a few pounds saved from the money they had got from passing through hell and immediately they would fall into the hands of the corner-boys and lowest "bowsies" of Ballycullen. There might be a

few quiet days in an attempt to win oblivion and blindness from appalling memories and horrid sights. Then a fight, maybe, with one of the corner-boys, and blood drawn in the muck of the street, and shouts and the re-whooping of half frightened, half-savage war cries from Ypres and Bethune, with Sergeant Leonard suddenly coming sweating amongst them to quell the noise. . . . There were others, of course, the more innocent of the lambs who had gone on young, supple limbs to the slaughter. Michael would often stop to drop a word with them, for they, too, were drawn to the mean torture of the corner. Whenever he heard them speak, his mind was kindled into a fuller and finer sympathy. He could see that something monstrous had been suddenly projected into their lives until they were no longer the light-hearted fellows with whom he had played football and hurling but a year or two before. And it was all the more strange to think that his countrymen were beginning to have a certain mean and unworthy anger in their hearts against these poor lads. Michael could always feel as he talked with them the guiltiness of those who had told them that it was really for Ireland they were fighting when they went to France. It was surely a lonely destiny to which they had been called. Their own countrymen did not want them now and England would not want them for very

long after they had served her turn. . . . He was often maddened by the sound of some gross insult flung savagely upon hard words at one of these poor souls by the corner. . . . But how could he, as a Sinn Feiner, possibly say a word? He was rather content to expect consolation for himself and the tormentors of these from those who were striving to prevent young Irishmen from enlisting in the British army. Yet, very often would it appear to him that the men who were getting jailed for this by England were in enmity to a certain rotten element in their own country as well as to that which lay further afield. And, already was it extending further into his soul, this realisation of the traitorous element which continually stood for the denial of what was great and beautiful and heroic in the soul of Ireland. It was something more than a portion of the afflicted warp of all human life. It was a quality which stood up fiercely urging defeat of what was bravest and best always. There were a great many around Ballycullen who disapproved of the present activity of the Sinn Feiners.

"Damn it, but they're going a bit too far with it, anyway. Now, d'ye know what I'm going to tell you? I would not like to see England bet in this war. That's honest; but, sure, I have to be in the fashion by talking the other way."

He saw, too, that the aspiring fops of the lo-

cality, the imitators aforetime of St. John Marlowe, went about now with all the more rabid Sinn Fein papers sticking ostentatiously out of their pockets, "The Spark" and "Honesty" replacing "London Opinion" and "The Winning Post."

"Did you see this?" they would suddenly say, taking out one or another of these obscure sheets and pointing to some scurrilous and laboured witicism at the expense of T. N. Kettle or Stephen Gwyn, or another of the other recruiting sergeants. As one with a fairly long-standing reputation for being a Sinn Feiner, Michael was forced to show some interest, although this was scarcely Sinn Fein. There was a time, not so far back, when Sinn Fein seemed to light a lamp which shone out over the world. But this was mean; this was low. . . . Yet, there were, even still, grand flashing moments. . . . It was in "The Spark" that he first read Padraic Pearse's oration over the grave of O'Donovan Rossa, the heart within him leaping gladly to the throb of the mighty words:

"It has been thought well, before we turn away from this place in which we have laid the mortal remains of O'Donovan Rossa, that one among us should, in the name of all, speak the praise of that valiant man. And if there is anything that makes it fitting that I rather than some other, I rather

than one of the grey-haired men grown old with him in suffering, should speak here, it is, perhaps, that I may be taken as speaking on behalf of a new generation which has been re-baptized in the Fenian faith and which has accepted the responsibilities of carrying out the Fenian programme."

He was one of the generation for which Pearse spoke thus so proudly. He was a man of the age of Cuchullain and the Red Branch Knights, the Homeric Age of Ireland. But what of the bulk in reality of the Irishman of his time? The breed of them had been great fighters in the "eighties" for the land and the fill of their bellies but never since nor perhaps never again.

All through the winter he had knowledge, through the little papers, of what was passing in Dublin. Some part of Ireland, at least, was being freed from the drugging, poisonous influence of Redmond and his Party. He was with them most truly in the unity of spiritual kinship; his little room now was at once a temple and a cell. It was dedicated to the memory of all those who had died for Ireland and it seemed to hold, through power of his lonely brotherhood, the imprisoned souls of those who would die again. In Ballycullen, now, there was urgent need of such spiritual communion. . . . He refilled his mind continuously with the dark, destructive anger of Mitchel. . . .

Some evenings when he would take a walk to ponder what he had read on the nights before, he might meet Mirandolina walking, lonely, too, and only the faintest glimmer of recognition would pass between them. The grind of Marcus Flynn's had remained much the same. He began to think of "bettering" himself, of going to Dublin. He had already mentioned his intention casually to a few, but he could see that, even so soon, was it having a definite result in two directions. Marcus Flynn spoke of raising his salary and Mirandolina made efforts to struggle back into his friendship. . . . Once or twice upon meeting, it would seem quite accidentally, she had glanced at him shyly with a smile hovering tremulously upon her lips.

About Christmas the results became definite; his salary was raised and he became friendly with Mirandolina again. They had soon fallen to talking just as if nothing had happened at any time to set up even the faintest misunderstanding between them, and, even though he began to grow more and more fond of her, he did not become less fond of Ireland. There seemed to be upon her now an eagerness to be meeting him that was curiously fettering when he had so recently thought of being away in Dublin. . . . Besides, in her presence, too, he never felt quite so free. . . . Quite unconsciously, perhaps, but

by her talk, she would be always dragging him down from his dream into the barren byways of life which straggled out like muddy boreens from all the talk of Ballycullen. Yet, this was life. . . . Such and such a couple were engaged and would soon be married. . . . How they were getting a little place and setting up a shop of their own. . . . How it must be so grand to have a place of one's own and to be settled down. . . . The power of Ballycullen (this was the burden of her talk) could not then cut so powerfully between two that loved. . . . There were times when his lonely soul would seem eager beyond all greater yearning to snatch some comfort from her words, and so they would be supremely happy in their friendship upon many an idyllic night. But he would be continually breaking away in his mind from the trend of the talk which was a joy to her. . . .

Sometimes she grew petulant and said cruel, unreasonable little things, as a woman always will in the unseen presence of the thing that threatens her love. . . . He would talk of what was brewing in Dublin and what might happen there soon. . . . Then her love would be most wondrously re-kindled, and she would speak in that wild way of the heart which is past all understanding of the mind. She would kiss and fondle him and whisper winning, soothing words

as a mother might to a wayward child whose mind was upon some wild, dangerous way of play. . . .

* * * * *

About St. Patrick's Day, 1916, she almost felt herself losing her grip of him again and she grew afraid to have him away from her in the evenings. It seemed to her almost as if one whole evening's brooding in his lonely room might lead to disaster. There was something in the air. . . . And then came Easter Week, stark and terrible in its surprise.

Someone who had travelled to and from the Fairyhouse races on a bicycle told it in Thomas Cooney's and in Marcus Flynn's almost simultaneously. To the lovers this news was tremendous, thrilling, filling him with a sudden sense of pain, her with a feeling of anxious gladness. Thomas Cooney had merely torn the paper he was reading in the drapery into a hundred "fliggits," and Marcus Flynn had solemnly cursed his God and then retreated to the comfort of the bottle. . . .

It was a dark, misty night and all day the pools had been like dull mirrors of tragedy upon the street of Ballycullen. . . . He could not speak to her as she clung wildly to his arm all along the old way of the ivy boughs. . . . It was in Dublin he should be on this Easter Monday in the year of our Lord, 1916, fighting for his coun-

try with the men of Ireland. It seemed as if all his life should have moved inevitably to this glad consummation. He was wildly silent, merely sighing nervously.

"I am sorry, Michael," she said. "It is I who have kept you from them. God knows I have done it, but I was glad to-night when I heard how it had come to this. I knew that if you had gone to Dublin there before Christmas, then you'd have been out with them now. Imagine little me doing this with my talk and kisses. Do you remember the poetry book that you lent me, *The Eyes of Youth*, with the Arab love song by Padraic Colum? Don't you remember the lines?

"And as for the kisses of women—these are honey,
the poet sings,

But the honey of kisses beloved it is lime for the
spirit's wings."

She laughed almost hysterically.

"Oh, I'm glad, God knows I'm glad, for doing what kept you here! "

She clung to him in passionate thankfulness to herself for his presence by her side as she went on babbling love words which were half unheard by him. . . . Then she began to speak quietly:

"But, listen, Michael, where's the use in it at

all? Sure, they can't be more than a little handful, anyway, and maybe they're beaten by this. Don't you know well what the English are? Sure, poor little foolish me never knew until you taught me the history of Ireland. May the Lord Jesus have mercy upon the souls of them that's dying for Ireland this night! ”

These last words seemed to stir him a little out of his trance. . . . They smote him with a sense of the pitiful littleness of all human life, and it had been given Mirandolina to speak them. They made him hear again, in one startling instant of remembrance, his own words on the night they had first come to talk greatly to one another during the production of the Robert Emmet play in the Courthouse. He had spoken that night of dying for Ireland and surely now he must be no more in her eyes than the drunken braggarts of Ballycullen, who had ever taken the easiest way of making great fellows of themselves in the eyes of their girls by talking of dying for Ireland. . . . He was of their generation and their creed and yet he was not in Dublin with those who were dying to-night. . . . It appeared suddenly to his agonised consciousness as an abnegation of his manhood.

Yet had the quiet pity of her words flashed him into dearer kinship with those who were dead or dying. And so it was that the first words he

spoke were nearer to reality than any which had yet passed between them.

"I hope you don't think bad of me for this, Mirandolina, that I am not there, and that because of it you will never throw the laugh in my eyes. I'm chained here, God knows I am. My father lost all by fighting this same fight, although the methods were different. There's my mother and sister, Mirandolina, and you know that I must keep them as best I can. It would be hard to see them having to stretch out the hand to the purse-proud shopkeepers of Ballycullen or go down the road some lonely evening and into the workhouse."

"Of course not, darling. I understand aye, even far better than you. Sure, it is all this that I have been striving hard for so long to make you see that Ballycullen, and all it means to you, are nearer than Ireland. God knows, Michael, I'd do anything for you and it goes to my heart to see you wasting yourself upon impossible things and impossible dreams. In a day or two you'll be seeing how foolish all this wild adventure in Dublin was, and then, maybe, it's what you'll be thanking me. And, although I don't know them to speak to, I'd be glad, indeed, to be telling this to your mother and sister."

Her words in their quietness were so very real that it was little wonder he seemed to come

down gasping a little from what suddenly appeared merely a cloudy eminence of conceited dreaming. Already was struggling into his consciousness a certain disillusionment regarding this Easter Rising. They might be beaten, it was true, but they were fighting this ancient battle against England and so his heart was with them. . . .

There was peace upon the mind of Mirandolina at parting. She knew that she had triumphed over him even in this great crisis. It was a somewhat sobered Michael Dempsey who went back to the house where he lived with his mother and sister. . . . His thought was not wholly introspective. The greatest thing since the Rebellion of Robert Emmet was happening this night in Dublin, yet Ballycullen appeared quite undisturbed. The most gallant gentlemen since the Fenians of '67, the Fenians of 1916, were dying for love of them, and yet he could see that, in their cowardice, the men of Ballycullen were going to bed earlier than usual. Through the mind of his girl on this very evening he had begun to see again in its full significance the immense power which would range itself on the side of England now, and spell defeat, as always. And yet, as he closed the door of his little room behind him, he was not without a prayerful hope that, by some great atonement, it might be cleansed,

and that his country might yet be seen very radiant in a mirror of blood. . . .

* * * * *

He remained there, torn to his very soul, until near daybreak when he proceeded very carefully to burn his plans for a successful rising. . . . The dawn itself had never seemed to be so coldly bright as he sat there over the ashes that remained of them in the little grate. . . .

CHAPTER XV

EASTER WEEK, 1916

THE next fortnight passed in one continuous whirl of rumour. No one seemed to realise what was happening in Dublin although all were agreed that something fierce was going on. After all his reading of the history of rebellions, mistily radiant through the perspective of the years, it was curious to be living through the period when a real rebellion was passing in Dublin. The most fantastical stories were being told each day in Thomas Cooney's and in Marcus Flynn's. There was to Michael a most ludicrous and contradictory quality in every item of news. It was infinitely sickening to see the things of gold all muddled with the dirt of the street.

One of the strangest things was one of the first to be apparent. With those who had recently expressed rebel sympathies there was some kind of feeling that the rebellion was in the nature of a personal affront. It was all very well to have talked, to have shown enthusiasm in support of the thing that was saving them from military service, but this rebellion now was neither right

nor proper, so everyone said. Besides, it would give the Government an opportunity of coming down on Ireland once more. It was made to appear as bad tactics, for how the hell, they said, could England have budged if they had merely let on they were going to fight the way the Irish Party had worked it for long years? In fact, to many it appeared that the Irish Party had merely provoked this outburst, like the clever devils they were, so that they might soon sweep tremendously into power again.

The first definite news that came was news of defeat, in itself, perhaps, old and honourable in Ireland, but still defeat, a saddening thing telling as of old of wasted bravery and of wasted blood. Michael found himself very curiously mixed up in the reality of thought which replaced the phantasy of the rumours. Larkin's crowd were out again and this was something in the nature of a real attack upon the people of Ballycullen, at least to their own way of thinking. There were not a few of them who had lost money through their dividends declining in the Dublin United Tramways during the period of the great strike. Michael, never ready to speak ill of any man, had not spoken ill of Larkin. The subtle bond which united him to all men struggling for the right had manifested itself again with regard to the labour leader. There were men who looked darkly at

him now that they remembered this. . . . Wasn't Connolly in it and wouldn't Larkin have been in it, too, if they hadn't run him out of the country? It was something damnable to think of that crowd robbing the poor, unfortunate shopkeepers and employers of Dublin. . . . Marcus Flynn fumed in and out of the shop continuously and his fury was so immense at all times that Michael knew full well that, were he foolish enough to open his mouth, it would spell instant dismissal. . . . He had never seen his employer quite in this state before. He was like a raging madman. Nothing else could explain the extraordinary fact that he had gone into Thomas Cooney's and stood himself a drink, Thomas almost falling out of his standing because of the unaccustomed friendliness of the action. On the same day Thomas himself lurched into the shop where Michael was, looking for his "old friend Marcus" to have a chat with him. A little later he could hear them complimenting one another that "the whole country was united now against them damned ruffians that were after breaking out in Dublin."

In the days immediately after this, the feeling of unity seemed to find further expression. Often as he stood at the door now striving half blindly to glimpse some meaning on the street of Ballycullen, he would see within earshot the Sergeant

discussing the situation with a group of young men.

“D’ye know what I’m going to tell you? Sure it’s all nonsense. The Government’ll make mince-meat of them.”

He became more emphatic in his thought of the rebels’ villainy when he spoke of Ashbourne and the battle that had been fought there.

“The curse of hell on the County Meath men and the curse of hell on the County Dublin men. The bad drop was in them to go attack the police! ”

Between all, the poor man had been given an anxious time. The worry come of his own cowardice was upon him and, besides that, as part of his job, he was expected to put some courage into the remaining peelers of Ballycullen. As these were mostly married men, one or another of their wives was almost always certain to be in the barrack wailing loudly in dread that her husband would have to go to “The Front.” Then there were the worries to which he was subjected externally by the shopkeepers of Ballycullen. They were all in such a state about their money. The money in the keeping of the Post Office had already been transferred to the barracks and so a headline had been struck which all of them were anxious to copy. They had him worried almost out of his mind, he said.

On the Friday of the first week when Mr. Alexander Waddell and Mr. St. John Marlowe did not arrive as usual from Castleconner at twelve o'clock, there was a kind of panic. The little shopkeepers ran this way and that, asking one another did they think had the Bank gone smash or what on earth was to become of them at all. So the torture, replacing the mean joy of this moment when every one of them had been accustomed to run up to the Bank with their bits of money in their fists, had come inevitably. Therefore, it was little wonder that the sergeant was mad, for how could a man in danger of his life and having the anxiety of a lot of people in danger of their money upon him at the same time, be expected to remain calm. He cursed a great deal, the Sinn Feiners, the Government, and the day he joined the force. There was something decent about being a soldier. One had only one bother to face but this was a very nest of annoyance.

On the Monday of the second week a diversion was created by the appearance of rambling Seumas in the street. He was one who had come often to Ballycullen, a powerful dark man with a great voice and a fiddle. The reputation of Seumas consisted in the rumour that he tramped this way out of Connacht and up through the Midlands making a fine living out of the people

of Ballycullen, who had so many scoundrels like him ready to thrive on them. In his ballads he communicated and kept alive the history of Ireland. As he had gone from door to door proceeding through his repertoire, he had, to his own thinking at least, maintained a little flicker of nationality. But of late he had come to be regarded merely as a ragged survival from a vanished Ireland, who, in October and in April, passed this way, lifting a good bit of money out of Ballycullen by his performances from door to door. In fact, he had always left it with his breeches pocket heavy with coppers and calling down a blessing on all the good people who were there.

Now, this evening, as he came into Ballycullen past the police barracks he felt that, step by step, was he coming nearer Dublin, where the actuality of all the singing he had been doing for so many years was happening now. He had always been well received by the people of this place. He would frighten hell out of the peelers immediately. . . .

The first door at which he stopped was that of Marcus Flynn. Michael came out and gave him sixpence before he started and this looked like a good omen. Marcus heard the scrape of the fiddle, as he sat in the parlour and he came out of the shop in a fierce whet of temper. It was

bad enough surely to have all the worries of the devil on a man's mind, without having this lousy old cur coming along to set a fellow mad altogether with his singing. His coming almost made itself heard to Seumas, who was blind, so he struggled timidly away from the door. In Thomas Cooney's a crowd of men, drinking to ease their anxiety, had to hold one another from getting at him when he came in to ask the reward of his singing of "Who Fears to Speak of Ninety-Eight." Thomas himself, thinking it safer than to have a ballad-singer murdered on the premises by someone who was after taking a drop too much in the shop, sent up to the barracks for the sergeant. But rambling Seumas, out of the rebellious mood of the vagrant, managed to bawl out another ferocious song before the whole force of twelve peelers moved down in a body to arrest him. They caught him and broke his fiddle into a hundred smithereens and kicked him down through Ballycullen. Out of his mouth, which was all bloody from their blows, he went on bawling songs that faded into silence over the bog like the mournful cries of sad birds. . . . But although the plan that had come into his mind of singing proudly, rebelliously, all the road to Dublin had been broken, thus almost at its inception, he could not be robbed of memory of the songs which enshrined the deeds of those who were

gone. . . . And there might be songs made about those who were dying now and he was the man would sing them. He drank all he could get in the wayside pubs, and no one who saw a blind, mad ballad-singer passing along the roads of Meath and roaring wildly felt that he represented a definite climax in Irish history. . . .

Back in Ballycullen a feeling of jubilation was beginning to creep in triumphantly. The rebels were after being beaten, beaten to hell, and so men were returning to the ancient sense of security again. They knew the fierce comfort of a certain satisfaction, too. It was fine to think of the bloody-looking idiots that were after getting up to destroy the country being bet to blazes. A grand-looking lot of devils, anyway, with English names and the like, that nobody ever heard of before, and the whole damned lot of them, maybe, in the pay of the Government.

A paper from Belfast had somehow managed to get to Ballycullen, and this gave an account of how O'Connell Street was in ruins, and the back was broken in the rebellion. The Sinn Feiners were beaten and everyone was against them already because they were beaten. If by any chance they had won, a great many must, ere now, have been making political somersaults to their side. But now, because they had failed, it was "the curse of hell on them." "Did anyone ever hear such non-

sense? ” “ To go get up in the middle of the war to go attack what protected them all along from the hated Hun! ” “ Traitors to their brothers and they dying for them beyond in France! ” “ All for the sake of Germany! ” “ The dirty black streak breaking out in the Irish even at the present time! ” “ Rebellions were all damn fine long-ago, but it's no sort of work to be doing at the present time! ” “ Why, begod, you'd think that we were still bloody savages in the heart of Africa ready to lep at one another's throat whenever we feel like it! ” “ Sure, I suppose there was nothing only Irish chaps in the regiments they mowed down coming in from Kingstown! ” “ Home Rule is finished now anyway! ” “ Poor John Redmond, it will go to his heart! ”

The May Fair had come but it had not been attended by any dealers. Neither Alexander Waddell nor St. John Marlowe had been there to open the Bank. This, to everyone an almost sacrilegious breach of custom, seemed to summarize and signify the villainy that the outburst had been.

“ Now d'ye see what the rebellion is after doing, and d'ye know what I'm going to tell you? Only for the Government we wouldn't have the bit to put in our mouths, and that's God's truth.”

Out of this kind of talk and a thick, heavy silence leaped a sense of gloom and disquieting

foreboding of the future. In Michael's mind continuously was a thought that had sprung there on Easter Monday night and it was that the period which stretched from the General Election of 1910 had been one of set back for Sinn Fein, and that, as often happens in a country moving nebulously towards Freedom, the destructive element had been all this while moving into the ascendant.

It appeared to him that there could be no room in a country like Ireland for a constitutional and a revolutionary movement: signifying on the one hand a certain dependence upon England, and on the other complete independence. Thus had come inevitably this conflict between these two policies through the universal disturbance of the Great War. Ireland had not been equal to the travail of a bloodless revolution because even re-birth must begin in blood. . . .

It was a puzzling feature of Michael's mind to see how intensely sane his outlook could sometimes be, and his reason, too, when one considered the wild, weedy places in which it sought its food. It was, in short, a mentality bespeaking a certain political culture which might have given him an honourable standing in a country that, unlike Ireland, had not been poisoned to its very soul by politics. . . . Thus was it all the more strange

how the blood of him could be always so easily fired into a sentimental regard.

He had almost become, through the inner consolation, induced by outward persecution and misunderstanding, now fully resigned to his great betrayal of himself by his absence from Dublin.

One evening a Dublin paper was given him by Mirandolina. It contained the simple announcement that the O'Rahilly had been killed in Moore Street. His immediate thought had one touch of the colour of Ballycullen. This was a rich man, they said, richer than anyone in Ballycullen, and yet he thought all that he had very little to give to Ireland. . . . This news plunged him into a black, bitter mood again, and Mirandolina could get no good of him at all. The rebellion and all that it meant to him now made an immense, leaden sadness.

"Musha," she said petulantly, at last, "why didn't you go to Dublin and be done with it, anyway?"

He broke from her quietly and they went home by different ways. . . . In the days which followed his little room seemed to call him again. They were beginning to shoot the leaders now. . . . He began to think of his plan for a rising that he had burned. The Sergeant came more often into the shop to warn him as a friend that it might be better if he burned any incriminating

literature in his possession. . . . It seemed that Ireland was again to be thrown back one hundred years. And he was going with it. There was really nothing in his little room now which was worth keeping in defiance of the advice of the Sergeant. . . . Oh, God, it was a room of agony and of the blindness and dumbness of defeat. . . .

CHAPTER XVI

VICTORIES

IRELAND seemed to pass now into one of the accustomed states of drifting futility, wherein all that was bravest and best would seem to be submerged by some dark, meaningless, muddy flow. The flower of the rebel leaders had been long in the grave, and Dillon and Devlin were making great speeches once again. Roger Casement had been hanged with all the show of mediæval butchery which marked the killing of Robert Emmet 113 years before. In all that long century and more the British had been unable to shed the beast in them. Michael was left to snatch some comfort from such melancholy relics of the dead as Thomas McDonagh's poem of "The Suicide":

"Here when I have died,
And when my body is found,
They will bury it by the roadside
And in no blessed ground.

And no one my story will tell,
And no one will honour my name;
They will think that they bury well
The damned in their graves of shame.

But alike shall be at last
The shamed and the blessed place,
The future and the past,
Man's grace and man's disgrace.
Secure in my grave I shall be
From it all and quiet then,
With no thought and no memory
Of the deeds and the dooms of men."

It was a lonely thing to remain with this and with picture postcards of those that were gone. . . . Soon, however, the old spirit was bursting out to the light, as it had always done after every defeat, in doleful ballads. "Who Fears to Speak of Easter Week?" was being sung with such a widespread vehemence as to claim for it an enkindling quality greater than that of the poor parody which it was of a finer song of a more spacious day. It was in ten thousand throats and more emphatically in those which had been accustomed to display their vocal powers in productions out of the English music-halls.

The general round-up which was going on now was driving even the most degraded shoneens to make some sort of show. Anyhow, and at their worst, the cursed Government could not put a whole country in jail. . . .

Marcus Flynn and Thomas Cooney were very princes of political dominion in Ballycullen in these days. What harm could a few idiots sing-

ing songs do to them any more than Rambling Seumas that the peelers had kicked forever out of Ballycullen. No one from Ballycullen had died for Ireland. Even he who should have made the great atonement for this place had not died and no song had been made about him. He was still only Michael Dempsey, the shop-boy in Marcus Flynn's.

All through this period he was meeting Mirandolina. Her sentimentality was being captured gradually by the overwhelming impulse of the time. She continually wore little ribbons or badges and read little books or leaflets in memory of and in sympathy with the ideals of those who were dead. Even Thomas Cooney permitted a display of such sympathies on the part of his employes, for although it was not a change that pleased him he saw that the country was gradually veering round to this side. He still loudly asserted his allegiance to the old party and the old cause but a man like him had to manoeuvre as best he could between all the damnable twists of the Irish mind. . . . The commonsense of such tactics was being forced on Marcus Flynn, too, although ever since the rebellion he had been moving from the shop to the room, saying very fiercely, so that Michael might hear:

"Where's the bloody Sinn Feiners now?

What? Hah! Explain! Where the hell are they now—I say?”

All the same he was pleased that Michael was a Sinn Feiner, for it was something of which he could take business advantage. The fact that he possessed such a shop-boy, and Thomas Cooney did not, appeared as something in the nature of a personal, not to say a political, triumph. It fully flattered his opinion of himself.

There was much in what Michael realised around him now with which he was out of sympathy. He felt as if he must some day be driven to express his distaste of it. There was something almost heroic, something certainly appeared a more intimate part of his militant being which he felt was best expressed in not being at one with the collective mind that, on matters of politics, he felt must be always wrong. After all, the best men were those who had stood most alone. Parnell had been greatly alone at the end, because he was a good man.

Mirandolina was not pleased that he should consistently want to be different. Her talk was always crowded with significance. There now was Seumas McEvoy, who had never been anything, but who already had seen his great opportunity and taken it. He had opened a little shop and was already doing a thriving business in Sinn Fein books, Sinn Fein papers, Sinn Fein Songs and

Sinn Fein badges. There seemed to be a hint in this that Michael should have done something of the same kind, and, had he done so, it seemed that she must have come into more love for him. In her eyes, then, he would have been something like a Sinn Feiner, as well as appearing more of a man. . . . He felt inclined to have a tiff with her one evening when her words went on to suggest this to his mind. She had already hinted that she was growing a little weary of her life in Thomas Cooney's and there was a curious, wistful, intimate note of regret in her voice when she tried to tell him how a girl fades in a draper's shop in a country town. . . .

The men who were euphemistically described as "Prisoners of War" came out of jail at Christmas, and this might be said to mark the beginning of the new political period when the flood of eloquence became almost as torrential as of old. The Peace Conference had replaced the old house in College Green as the Hy Brazil of Ireland. The truth, in the nature of a triumph to a great many, but to him and a few others as something more nearly akin to defeat, was that Sinn Fein had become a political party. It would seem to be out to capture the country. Stalwart Chairmen of County and District Councils who, a little while since, had been hanging affectionately to the coattails of John Redmond,

because they were looking for jobs on behalf of all their friends to the most distant degree of blood, were now standing up in the face of the world to declare their advocacy of this new cause. The might of Redmondism had of a sudden become a feeble, defeated, thing. The signs were so strongly significant to any fool that it was plain a general election would see Sinn Fein sweeping the country.

The antics of the newspapers were certainly sufficient to excite at least amusement. Day by Day "The Freeman," slipping further and further towards a deserved damnation, clutched at straws and the shadows of straws drifting with it down the dark tide of its own futility in desperate hopes of a little political salvation. "The Independent" gave the widest publicity to the aspect of victory which stood for this defeat, with apparently no other aim in view than the bringing of heavy sorrow to the heart of "The Freeman." Although its tremendous attitude was sufficient to deceive a great many, Michael could see that, although the flesh of "The Independent" was willing the spirit was weak. "The Irish Times," in its heavy concern for the welfare of Ireland, was, perhaps, the most amusing of the three, since the humour shone so unconsciously through its ponderous seriousness.

The election of Count Plunkett for North Ros-

common was made to appear an event of more real and actual importance to the New Ireland than the Rebellion of Easter Week. The mind of the idealist was a thing difficult of understanding, but to "best" another man even thus magnificently at the polls was in intimate relation to the game they were always playing in Ballycullen.

Michael cycled to Longford and from meeting to meeting when the election was at its highest pitch of excitement there. In the conduct of the campaign there was nothing so very different from all that he remembered of a fight between a Nationalist and an Independent Nationalist in the days before Sinn Fein had dared to lift its head. The staunchest supporters of Joe McGuinness had once been staunch supporters after the same fashion of some nominee of Redmond's. In many of its aspects the whole thing seemed little more than a determined return to the ancient factionism with which his country had been so heavily cursed. Of course, there was an attempt to colour with the merely melodramatic significance of the rebellion this small fight as if it were for this and this only that Pearse and Connolly had died. . . . As a sudden illumination Michael caught a glimpse of political opportunists of both parties secretively drinking hand to fist in an hotel bar in Longford town. . . . He carried this with him back all the road to Ballycullen as

an impression vastly more important than the feeling created by the spectacle of John Dillon attempting to teach the young priests of Ireland their religion from a penny catechism. . . . Surely to God there was something wrong with his country, something terrible and inexplicable which boggled his intellect as he tried to puzzle it out. There sprang into his mind as bits of explanations the strangest and most contradictory notions. Yet the only certainty to him was the conviction that the winning of Ireland at the polls could never be more than what the journalists always like to call "A Pyrric Victory."

He tried to explain the gathering force and direction of his thoughts at this juncture to Mirandolina. She did not appear very anxious to follow his reasoning. Her way of making a show of her political convictions was by spending a good deal of her time in the long bright evenings chatting about Sinn Fein with Seumas McEvoy over a show of Sinn Fein merchandise. . . .

Then came the East Clare Election and the sentimental side of Michael was touched once more by the dashing and romantic figure of Eamonn De Valera. It seemed that this man talked differently, and might he not be the very one to kindle the embers of the nation towards the great flame.

So influenced was he by the tremendous victory

that he led the "James Connolly" Sinn Fein club through the street of Ballycullen in celebration on the night of the declaration of the poll, and everybody cheered madly, with the exception of Thomas Cooney and Marcus Flynn, although their shop-girl and shop-boy were in the crowd.

He went to see Griffith and De Valera at a meeting in Mullaghown a few Sundays later and was keen to realise the poor colour of the mere frothings which ebbed and flowed upon the empty cheers around them. . . . But he saw the proud head of De Valera and heard the voice of Griffith. He was happier than for many a month, and Mirandolina had begun to meet him more often. . . . In fact, there seemed to be upon her the very same anxiety about being with him that she had shown during Easter Week.

There came many a moment now in the lonely room in his mother's house when he tried still further to puzzle out the strange mixture of contradictions that Mirandolina was, and the stranger mixture which was his country. Poor Mirandolina Conway and poor Dark Rosaleen! How sad the finest love that ever was might come to seem when the heart's flame is quenched! Love of country, love of woman. It would be all the same when the ending came and the fire had gone out. . . .

CHAPTER XVII

SINN FEIN AND SOLUTION

THERE were moments in its history when Ballycullen appeared to be situated psychologically as well as geographically in the very middle of Ireland. More especially now, when the tumult which had begun in Clare seemed to boom greatly around the silence of this place in which one might endeavour to realise the meaning of the encircling sound. It often seemed almost a part of all beauty and wisdom for the mind of Michael Dempsey to look out upon the world from its prison in Ballycullen and to feel his country struggling at last into the great, pulsing flow of world life. Ireland, it would almost seem, had begun to move at last towards some lofty destiny. The Hamlet of the nations was beginning to throw off the mantle of sadness which had enshrouded it with its own nature.

It often seemed very strange to himself that he was one of those to first see the essential truth which might eventually shape this present condition of the National mentality. Sinn Fein had

always been to him a thing of splendour and immense importance although it ignored the disturbing element of political development and determination by the accidental circumstances of any unforeseen moment, and this was the most important political factor in the world of the present.

A policy created upon a sense of the past was striving desperately to adjust itself to a situation which it had not previously studied, for the situation it had evolved almost treacherously from the feeble human breed in the Ireland of the time. Sinn Fein, it would seem, had managed successfully to adjust itself to the moment, because, by a curious coincidence, the moment itself was in the melodramatic tradition of the past. It might not be able to adjust itself to the new political developments which must arise inevitably out of the economic realities of peace conditions with their certain monstrous aspects of surprise. Sinn Fein and the present had always appeared curiously antagonistic on the basis of any reality, and completely contradictory in terms of economics. There were moments when the Rebellion, with all its beauty and heroism, seemed a wild and fruitless adventure. The calling of it "The Sinn Fein Rebellion" was, although merely a journalistic mistake, in reality, more deadly to the real Sinn Fein spirit than the guns of Maxwell. But continually it appeared not so much was it what had ever

been said or done that mattered now as the force of the world impulse which brutally threatened the very soul of Ireland's older beauty. Yet, perhaps, the increasing tide of prosperity was what Ireland had been struggling for through every generation, and that the millennium had at last come to Ireland. Home Rule and every other dream had been realised in one great crash of poetic justice.

For the first time had been fully translated into action the idea that it is not its form of Government which controls a nation, but the supremacy of its own will. It was the interpretation of "ourselves alone" by Sinn Fein, but this interpretation would seem to have been intended only in relation to things of the spirit, and was surely never meant to signify the uncharitableness of vulgar, shoving individuals and groups who believed in getting everything for themselves alone and to hell, as they felt and said, with everybody else. It stood for self-reliance, self-respect, charity, common decency, comradeship, and now this other reality, so painfully manifest, was the negation of all these things. The very heart of Ireland had already begun to be decayed by the pride of prosperity until now it was rotten almost to the core. Michael's mind was, of course, reasoning with regard to the agricultural population. The real Sinn Fein spirit might survive still clean in the

cities, but always, from where he stood watching, he fancied that he was nearer the forces of life which caused the colour and expression of his nationality. . . . But could anyone have dreamt that the profits made out of England's war might have such a subtle power to destroy this, the cleanest thing he had ever known. Even the ostentatious bursting of young men into various acts of rebellion all over the country was, in reality, a denial of the same beauty. To put it very plainly, indeed, the whole thing appeared as the "letting off of so much steam." The men who had fought for the land and "the fill of their bellies" in the "eighties" had been better men and, in reality, nearer to spirituality than all those who prated so glibly of an Irish Republic. And even at the beginning of the succeeding dark, futile period there were men who had endured more for love of Parnell than a great many of the present breed were likely to endure for Arthur Griffith or De Valera. And what was all fighting worth if men did not stand to the last by their captain or their king? The poor, dwindled, blithering figure of John Redmond was something calculated rather to excite pity than the opprobrium embodied in all the mean scurrility which had dragged down his name in the dust.

The men with the real spirit in them could not be said to truly represent Ireland any more than

Michael at any period of his life could be said truly to represent Ballycullen. Looking out from Ballycullen over Ireland, one saw it more clearly than if one looked out from Dublin over Ireland. There seemed urgent need that the gathering pride of Ballycullen should be humbled, for Ireland was nothing more than a bigger Ballycullen, and it is through suffering only that National salvation may be won.

Continually some orator or another of Sinn Fein was asserting that the whole system of Imperialism in Ireland had broken down. It was something which Ireland had not achieved until now, but Ireland also had achieved the assumption of some alien quality, some brutality of mind shaping towards a certain tyranny which was, in reality, a negation of Sinn Fein, in fact of the very basic principle of Irish Nationality, for it made for intellectual subjection, the worst slavery of all. Ireland had not suffered through the war. In fact, quite the opposite. How many hundred times had Michael heard farmers say in the shop:

“Well, thanks be to God, but be hell this war is after making up the country, and damn the lie in it!”

There might be war profiteers in other countries, yet in those places, too, the men who had fought did not return like aliens, but as honoured

men. Bad as certain social conditions might be, it was scarcely thus they were talking of their own countrymen in other lands.

"Sure, they'll get no job. They'll get no land. They'll get nothing. Why, begod, weren't they awful bloody-looking idiots to go out and fight for England. What will England do for them now? "

What could England do? Had not the whole system of Imperialism in Ireland broken down? Those who had struck at the foundations of guilt were, for all that the young men of Ireland were wearing celluloid badges of them in their buttonholes and singing their names in songs, accounted pretty much as these others who had fought. They were all bloody fools. If a large proportion of the farming population of Ireland had subscribed to the National Aid Fund, was it not the best way just presently open of showing off the money they had made in the second and succeeding years of the War?

It was not that Michael really begrudged them their prosperity, but he would welcome anything which might make them worthy. He longed to think that, at last, something might make them sincere. Sinn Fein was almost altogether politics now and there was nothing needed but a general election to effect its complete substitution in everything for the vanishing Irish Party. There

was no promise of suffering in this unless, perhaps, the certainty of decline and ultimate defeat to complete the analogy which was a natural expectation in consideration of something relying for its existence upon anything so shadowy as the votes of men.

Connor Carberry! There now was a man who had surely suffered sufficiently, one would be driven to think, for his face looked almost as if it had been scarred by fiery knives, leaping almost murderously out of his own brain. And still, when Michael felt puzzled almost to distraction by all the ethical and political subtleties of his native country, he sought an answer and still found it in the same hopeless contact with this spent fire of ancient rages. It was sad, even as one talked to him, to see this old man, driven to suffer so much by the present, while he still talked so bravely of the days of old. His rheumy eyes seemed to be always full of the vision of a green flag with a gold harp on it forever flapping mournfully over those who were dead and gone. In life he counted for nothing at all, while his mind did not possess the full emancipation of the dreamer. . . . The cost of the accessories of his craft as hedge-carpenter had risen so considerably that scarcely anyone ever employed him now. He had refused to accept the pension, for was he not a proud, Fenian man?

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There were times when Michael, thinking he was hungry, would bring him some biscuits and cheese from the shop. Yet he never complained or made a request, for he was one of those in whom the powers of the mind were almost sufficient to triumph over the hungers of the body. . . . On the morrow of a night he would have spent with Connor Carberry there would be a quiet, empty feeling in Michael's heart as if something had been burned away by so wild passion of that lonely, broken man. . . .

It was infinitely laborious, even physically, to be always striving to find an answer to the questions which interrogated his very soul. It was little wonder, he thought frequently, that Mirandolina had again turned from him to swing her comely personality midway between two such contrasted gallants as Ambrose Donohue, who had put on the uniform of the king, and Seumas McEvoy, who was making a nice little penny out of the memory of the dead. He did not possess the courage of his lack of convictions. He was always torturing himself with grey-questioning, although there had been a time when the rich purpose of his mind had been as clear as amber. How queerly all things could turn? There seemed to be such an unaccountable twist in human nature, which, in its most tragic moments, became almost comic. How things were swung

so swiftly out of what would appear as their appointed courses, so that one could never tell but that even some wise, great plan of a politician might come to appear as the most benighted foolery in the end.

Above all others came crushingly his thought of Mirandolina, to whom he, at a time not so far back, had spoken of Robert Emmet and his dream of Ireland. She had gone walking with a British Officer, "a temporary gent," as he would now be described in the comic papers which had gone to create him. It might be that it was the martial gladness of Ambrose that had snatched her from him. . . . Perhaps, he thought, as they had gone walking around Ballycullen, Ambrose had talked of dying for Ireland, too, and maybe she had believed him.

Yet, through power of the feeling which had arisen in the country, Ambrose was either afraid or ashamed to come back to show himself off in Ballycullen now. The uniform he wore was no longer an appendage to adoration, and it constituted a further exemplification of the queerness of all things that this, a man who had always been sufficiently clever to adjust himself, could evidently think of no compromise between his present position and the present way of things in Ireland.

Now it was Seumas McEvoy who was gallantly

gesticulating before the poor little mind of Mirandolina, the talk of him wholly inspired by seditious Sinn Fein literature and all narrowing down to the final declaration of intention of dying for Ireland, a small sandy young man standing behind his own counter, his chest decorated by a number of medals which he had won from the G. A. A. hung on his watch-chain, and just presently making a good living by selling Sinn Fein merchandise. He was rapidly taking the place left vacant by the regrettable departure of Ambrose Donohue from the midst of Ballycullen. He was an authority upon every variation of the moment, every arrest, every sentence, every Grattan-like gesture of a leader, every "dirty move" of the poor old Irish party.

Although Michael often dropped in for a chat with him he was at no time vastly impressed by the personality or purpose of Seumas McEvoy. In occasional moments he thought it sad that it was to this man that his girl was now speaking. The riddle of Ireland and Mirandolina seemed to shape itself by degrees into a darker complexity.

There was only one place where it seemed reflected, although darkly as in a black pool, and this was in the sodden mind of Kevin Shanaghan. One night they had a memorable meeting. It appeared almost as the encounter on a rocky ledge of their hell of two tortured spirits destined in this

moment to commingle as flickers of flame, the strongest to leap high with the other absorbed through the more powerful impression it had made. Michael saw, in this stark instant, that Kevin Shanaghan was in the concluding stage of his life as a drunkard. Even now it was in the hurried, nervous manner of a dipsomaniac that he had caught his arm. . . . The war had left the mark of the beast even still further impressed upon this sad man. There had been huge quantities of drink stirring around Ballycullen for the past three years. He was laughing emptily, foolishly, his face darkly smeared with dirty beard and his eyes goggled into what at first appeared an idiotic stare.

"Michaelen, and how are you? I'm grand myself. Great, as the saying is, great. But d'ye know what they're calling me now? Begad, they're calling me 'The Comic.' Isn't that a develish name anyway to be giving a man of intellect, making him all as one as a circus clown, making even the flesh and blood of him a kind of jeer, and he walking around on his four bones? And it's not even as if I was making a living out of it, like a common whore. Did you ever hear the idiots talking about the stars and they half drunk? Did you ever hear what they call a comet, the lovely burning hair of a woman and it splashing golden across the skies? Well, they call that 'a

comic' too, the dirty *clobs*. So, you see, this night of Our Lord there's a comic on the earth and there's a comic in the sky, myself begod, and some lonely angel's golden hair. We're comics, God help us, myself and all that splash of glory, to the louts that come into Ballycullen in their dirty brogues to look for porter. . . . But Michaelleen, sure the comic going through the sky is not a woman's golden hair at all, but the colour of God's anger when the Almighty Man would like to spit upon the world. I often wonder that it doesn't drive him mad entirely. It was a queer thing out of God's anger, too, mebbe that left me seeing them as I do now. It was for sake of them I suffered, for sake of them I was jailed, for sake of them I lost my land. It was not until I fell down as far as I am now that I saw them. Then I became odious wise, a fool, mebbe, for the world to see, but in the very middle of my mind as wise as seven old men. I got to be not a bit like an Irishman. Why, begod, I was more like a Jap or a Chinaman, or a wise, godly man of India. I saw everything. I heard everything. I got to know everything. I was often not at all surprised to hear myself saying everything, for you must remember that I frequently spoke off the one platform with Michael Davitt and Charles Stewart Parnell. I wanted to destroy the me that they had once seen until I had rehabilitated my

intellect as that of the most wonderful statesman that the world had ever seen. I suppose that no one ever thought, and I leaning half drunk over some counter, that my mind was working with the speed of a Lloyd George or an Asquith and they holding a Cabinet meeting or taking Mr. Dillon or Mr. Devlin off to breakfast in Downing Street. I used often see a scrap of an English paper wrapped round a bottle that I'd be taking away with me for the night when I'd spot the account of some English journalist sent over here to study the question at first hand and it would make me think of the correctness of Shakespeare's saying, 'Lord, what fools these mortals be!' meaning, of course, the British. Isn't it damned curious that none of them ever found out me to tell what I know, and I dying to tell?"

Michael was almost grown tired of the incoherent outburst. The madness of drink was upon this poor, neglected, almost outcast man. It was sadder than any sadness, blinder than any blindness. . . . And he was clutching him again, his eyes looking wild yet not emptied of their strange light.

"I know," he said, with something different and calm returned to his voice. "It's not Sinn Fein, it's not Unionism, it's not even Constitutional Nationalism."

"It's nothing at all, I suppose," said Michael laughing.

Although he really did not mean to be unkind, the laugh seemed to hurt Kevin, whose talk now turned perfectly sane. It was filled with a reproach that sounded almost noble.

"I never laughed at you, Michaelleen, all the long days I was surprised and delighted to see that you had in you the seed and the roots of the idea I thought was going to bring joy 'to the heart of *Kathleen-ni-Houlihan*,' as the fellow said in the play. Nor I wouldn't laugh at you now, even though all you dreamt about is dead and gone, all killed and bet and murdered. But you wouldn't laugh if I told you of my plan, that's so simple and so natural, why a child could work it. I'm not going to tell you what it is, but to begin with it would mean converting the Irish People back to Christianity. As long as the British were really keeping them down, there was comradeship and charity in this country. I do be often afraid to think what it might have come to only for the civilising influence of the British."

There was no subtle, Swift-like irony in this, although it possibly possessed a glimmer of fine wisdom that had come through suffering and degradation. It seemed the oldest thought in the world, yet had it a new and surprising appeal for this poor, disillusioned man. It embodied some

ray of relief across the travail of his mind. The light upon his face grew brighter as he spoke again.

"And musha, Michaelleen, what kind of an infernal hell would we have in this country if we suddenly arrived at a Republic with the party that's in power at the present time jumping into all the Government jobs? Why, begod, it would be far worse than the persecution of the Penal Days for th' other party."

There was a sudden glimmer of truth to Michael even in this wild exaggeration.

"And so it must always be, for there's a damnable kink in us, an element of the traitor breaking out every time because we all think we're great fellows. What the hell, I ask you, could Redmond do when the very thing that killed him is out to kill Sinn Fein as well. What we want is something to level our pride and I wouldn't care a damn what it was so long as it levelled that. But I'm not relying on the brains of anyone else, for I have a lovely plan of my own that would do your heart good to hear."

Now it was Michael's turn to become suddenly wise, and to win a flash of gladness to his mind in a moment of intense clearness. This had been the way of it always. How many unfortunate men had thought that they had struck upon a way? All of them had dreamt, for something in

the very air of Ireland had filled their heads with dreams. It was the same in the case of the true man as in that of the traitor, with him who had rotted in jail and with him who had supped in Dublin Castle. It had evaded all of them so that their lives had left nothing of reality behind them. Even the mere thought of it stirred the mud of futility in one's mind still. Here now was Kevin Shanaghan, who must presently ask the price of a pint, a man that could still go about with his head encircled by the stars of his dream, although his patriotism had broken him. And Michael, too, although the certain traitorous element in Ireland itself had been continually felt by him in its full power, in its true significance or form he could make no attempt to define it. They were both strange "comics" falling ever through the same crowd of stars.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MATERIAL DEFENCE

EVER since he had burned his plans for the invincible rising, the mind of Michael, through many such little encounters and adventures, had been approaching nearer and nearer to reality. But the faith in which he had once believed so greatly had not yet gone down defeated. There was Ballycullen always such a stark reminder of the meaner significance of his country, but surely the last deluge of blood had not been in vain. This hope was the white rose which sprung out of the earth so richly sprinkled by that dew.

It almost seemed that he might have his rightful place now in the life of Ballycullen, for which he had so fiercely longed for but a little while since. All the young men seemed anxious to talk in the evenings of things they had just read in "Nationality" or "New Ireland" or "The Irishman." They were continually speaking with perfect familiarity, too, of the sentences upon lesser or greater men, of men in jail and of men on the run. A portion of their conversation, too, consisted in

the expression of an almost savage satisfaction when it would appear that the British casualty lists were on the increase. Marcus Flynn gave his silent consent to such prating for business purposes in his shop, because was not his rival in all things, Thomas Cooney, making a speciality of selling material for Republican flags in his "drapery?" Neither had much blame to give out for they were both doing very well, but both were vexed that they had been plucked away from a regular course of prosperity to perhaps a better way, but one which required an adjustment of their ancient political prejudices. Heretofore their minds had only been called upon to deal with little things, while now they were expected to maintain some show of personality in the biggest epoch that the world had ever seen. Often it would appear to their mean, stuttering intellects that the war might never end and that in some desperate Fee-Faw-fum-like or Jack the Ripper way the Germans must eventually destroy all before them. Cowardice is ever contagious and so now there was not a man of military age in Ballycullen but was a mad Sinn Feiner. This kind of Sinn Feinery stood for volunteering again. There was less display of military pride, because there was more fear than fun in these soldiers of Ireland who had sprung queerly out of a troubled time. The officers were all disguised as privates and

securely hidden in the ranks. Captain Beaumont Fortescue and the Hon Herbert Fitzherbert were notable absentees from the crowd of supporters. There could be no great meeting now and so a source of advertisement and power had been snatched from the hands of the gombeen-men of Ballycullen. Although he did not desire it at all, because he was not wholly in sympathy with the causes which determined it, Michael was now of more importance in the shop than Marcus his master. The distinction would seem to have arisen quite spontaneously, and if the war, so far, had wrought no good thing, this surely, in its essence held promise, perhaps, of good things to be. It was something in the nature of the end of the world, this sudden discovery that, at last, money and political influence were not able to purchase everything on God's earth, or save from disaster akin to death. But, although barely able to smother their tempers, the old men were not without some watchfulness for their chance of power again.

And as developments daily grew more serious, the young men seemed to cling naturally to Michael as their leader. Theirs was neither election nor selection; it was just the crying need of the moment that compelled them to seek him. Day by day the young man seemed further afflicted by panic and filled with the hopes that it was he alone could save them and there were

many fathers and mothers who felt that it was he alone could preserve their lads to them. "Marcus Flynn's" was, consequently, flourishing beyond any place in Ballycullen, and so Marcus himself could afford to sneer loudly at Thomas Cooney in satisfaction of his spitefulness whenever they met in the street, for their wonderful unity had broken down with the breaking up of the National Volunteers.

It grew upon Thomas that in keeping Michael on so long in the shop despite his unpopularity through inability to hit off with the people upon points of Nationality, until the fashion in politics had veered round so completely in favour of the brat, Marcus had effected a remarkable business score over himself. The continual torture of it drove him to think of Michael as the greatest enemy he had in the world and he felt that he would stop at nothing to bring down the cur and drive him out of Ballycullen. The only thing which saved his mind from almost certain defection was his shrewdness in awaiting his opportunity. . . . It should come. . . . Money was still not without some power in the world. . . . Despite all the big talk about a new heaven and a new earth the heart of mankind was still largely unchanged. . . .

The gathering protections of common sense about Michael's mind had been suddenly torn

away. His view-point had again been pushed out of balance until it was again lop-sided in its inclusion of the melodramatic. The British were being hard-pressed in France. This overshadowing reality seemed to make many other things unreal. . . . In the momentary submergence of certain elements he saw only the defeat of those elements. Perhaps he had been mistaken, and that *Sinn Fein* had won to final triumph after all; and upon these sure foundations he might rebuild his dream even here in Ballycullen. There was a revival of Volunteering but it was very different from the old style. There was now no open marching, no degrading parades from pub to pub. The miracle of a return to real Fenianism had been effected and drilling by night in dark quiet places was the order of the moment. There was much wild talk of taking to the hills and being put upon their keeping. There was much fortification of themselves to endure the privations of military service in the hope of defeating their obligations to military service. It was surely a comical stage-Irish situation. But there was no doubt that they would fight and though there were moments when Michael was still forced to see this certitude not as the result of courage but rather as the inevitable outcome of cowardice, it was none the less real as a circumstance of their lives because its greater reality was

the whole soul of him. . . . He saw a tremendous army rising in brigades and battalions all over Ireland at the command of Eamonn De Valera. He saw the English with their backs to the wall; he saw them finally being kicked into the Irish Sea. The Empire was down and out. There was not a Sinn Fein orator or a Sinn Fein journalist within the four seas of Ireland who did not loudly assert as much. "The Irish Independent" was very determined in its pronouncement. The solid determination of the Irish people, etc., etc.

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The national pledge to resist conscription to the death was to be signed in Ballycullen next Sunday, and a Defence Committee elected to administer the money which would be subscribed to the Anti-Conscription Fund. So far, there was nothing political about the widespread "determination," but Michael seemed to glimpse subconsciously an approaching attempt to administer some of the old political poison. Already many of the murderous emissaries of the old game had stolen by back doors into *Sinn Fein*.

Everything went to show that he was very near, at last, to the fateful crisis of his lifetime, out of which he might spring to some power for great good even in this place. His very soul was mobilising itself to a final effort.

As always when such moments had come into his life here he was meeting and speaking with Mirandolina again at the Hall which was the Headquarters of the present activity. She was a member of the Cumman-nam-Ban which had been rapidly organised out of willing material where one might have thought there was none. She was being trained to be one of "The Sinn Fein Nurses" as they called them in Ballycullen. Like all the rest she had been compelled to seek Michael for patriotic and military instruction. As they chatted in little glad moments of co-operation, he was again something like the man she had seen in the part of Robert Emmet. He appeared so perfectly unselfish and the shop of Seumas McEvoy had become, through the prosperity which had fallen upon it, more like Thomas Cooney's than a real Sinn Fein shop. . . . And he, on his part, was well content to forget the many little slights she had put upon him for sake of two others, one a soldier of Britannia and the other a soldier of *Kathleen-ni-Houlihan*, for was he not already a man of power without any of the boorishness which had long distinguished men of power in Ballycullen. As much as possible did he want to hold himself as an object-lesson in what the cultured decency of Sinn Fein might do for a man.

“ And him only a common shop-boy in Marcus Flynn’s.”

“ The Lord save us! ” “ Did anyone ever hear tell of the like? ”

The whole country was in a vague ferment and no one at all seemed certain of a proper course of action. The Mansion House Conference was in session with the object of formulating “ an offensive,” as the now blood-drenched pens of the daily press were calling it. Photographs had already been published of John Dillon sitting at the one table with Eamonn De Valera. This evidence of compromise was not altogether to the mind of Michael. He foresaw people, individuals with swollen and unhealthy ideas of their own importance, making determined attempts to attain to power and importance out of the present situation. Already was their talk of Funds, and Funds had always been demoralising and dangerous. This inability to escape from the collection of money had been responsible for much of the drift and futility. But it seemed inevitable. Yet was the mind of Michael immensely anxious to hold as much as he might be able to influence of this mighty movement cleanly together and for clean purposes. He had burned his plan after the failure of Easter Week, 1916, but now rapidly into his mind was thronging the still unshapen plans of another adventure for love of Ire-

land. . . . It grew upon him through the warm, exciting nights of April, 1918, almost with the intense, swift gladness of the pulsing earth. Great and heavy men were speaking ponderously all around Ireland, but he did not hear them, for his own mind was speaking with utter truth to his own heart.

A Defence Committee was about to be formed in Ballycullen and it was upon what might appear such a poor, ephemeral foundation that he was building his plan. On the day before the one upon which the momentous meeting was announced to be held he called the Volunteers together after a route-march and addressed them. This was his second speech. The first time had been on the night of the gun-running at Howth in 1914, when he had spoken out of the dream of his plan for an Irish Republic. Now, when the clay of his country had been mixed with the blood of Easter Week, to be remoulded into better men, they might fittingly be made the agents of a better plan. . . . Even as he spoke he saw the hoof-marks of England upon the faces of the young men where the accursed British Empire had trampled out their very souls, or that part of them which should have burned into a fierce look, now that their very lives were threatened. . . . Michael had seen the very same look, subdued almost to the expressionlessness of spiritual obliteration, on the faces of

the old, old men who had spoken of defending the coasts after Redmond had made his great speech upon the outbreak of the war. . . . These young men knew nothing of their language nor of the history of their country, nor of any decent scheme of co-operation for the well-being of their country. Yet it was to this he was appealing for assistance in winning the glorious end which he saw as a dim radiance. It was immensely moving for him to think that it was even here in this great movement that the power of his country's soul was, at last, fully concentrated. Their lives were threatened, their very women and their homes, and was not the old, beloved Ireland their common heritage? Yet was it a pitiful thing to think that, after all the deluge of words that had been spoken and written, and after all the fighting that had been done there was such a wide-mouthed lack of understanding, such a pachydermatous inability to understand. . . . At the end of his words they still seemed unconvinced.

He was compelled to feel their poor regard for him after all, the meanness of the thoughts now passing through their minds. . . . What he said might be all right enough, but why had it not come from the leaders. If only some of the great men of the day said it. Why wasn't it in the daily papers? They were prepared to believe

anything that might appear in the papers, but not the stark truth that he had been trying to tell. They would make a great show at the meeting tomorrow, as was only natural but they would be led by the leaders. . . .

To him there was only one aspect of leadership at present, the truth of each man's soul which had, at last, resolved itself into a compelling unity towards realising the soul of the nation. But the old dredging conception of leadership still clung about their minds a garment of gombeenism, gombeenism of Ballaghadereen, gombeenism of Ballycullen. And here was the God-sent opportunity of lifting his country to the windy summits of freedom out of the boggy lands of bondage. . . . He had sudden remembrance that the clanking of chains had filled all the little room where he had thought out his plan for a rising, only to burn it in the same room after Easter Week. But the plan and the hope he had in his mind now could not fail. It was a real thing, for it had come of the reality that had been forced upon him. His every other thought had been but the sadness of all dreaming.

The Defence Committee would not be formed from the men of power in Ballycullen, but from the young men, the men directly affected by the proposed extension of the Military Service Act to Ireland, the Volunteers. The sovereign power of

the nation would be vested in them and they would stand for a proud expression of the Nation's will. All the old forces of re-action and decay must sink into the background. Men of importance in little places would be put in such a position of insignificance and defeat as would fittingly express the spent forces which had once made them powerful. The District Councils, the County Councils, all those outposts of Dublin Castle would be swept away. It almost seemed queer to think that England had been so foolish as to give them this golden opportunity. But the statesmanship of England had been on the decline ever since the days of "ould Gladstone." The Ireland which had once kept its edge so keen had rusted only to spring by a miracle now as a clean and shining blade at the heart of the Empire. *The Empire was down and out.* And here, a part of some magical revenge, was a great army, a line of steely determination across Ireland. . . . This day also did he break into a lone cry on paper which he hoped might appear in print even at the bottom of some heavier and more important stuff in the daily press. His letter related to the Defence Committees. . . . It seemed to hint that they might be made the basis of a representative assembly to express the country at its cleanest and best. He had a notion that in other places

it might touch other minds with the flame that had been lit in his. . . . After all the paper he had blackened, this had the sudden, glorious appearance of the first real bit of writing he had done for Ireland.

* * * * *

It was a lovely April day when the Volunteers trooped into the meeting to elect a Defence Committee for the Parish. There was no ear-splitting music this time, just an air of quiet determination and a brake drawn up in the street. It was Thomas Cooney's brake and the implication of ownership was ominous. Before the Volunteers were well in line with it there was Thomas himself climbing into it with the same show of dignity, or rather of arrogant display which of old he had shown upon ascending the platform of any meeting that had ever been held in Ballycullen. He was immediately followed by some of the most select young men in the parish. The aspiring fops of farmers, who, through power and pride of their war-profits, had long since superseded poor Mr. St. John Marlowe and the snobs of his old days. They had sheltered with simulated enthusiasm behind *Sinn Fein* while huge sums by way of excess profits in their cattle were rolling in as a steady tide. They were consequently most anxious to save themselves from conscription now and what better security did the moment

offer than a seat on the Defence Committee? In fact, one of them was already speaking and Thomas Cooney was speaking and Marcus Flynn was speaking and Gilbert McCormack was making the best effort he could to interject a stutter here and there. They all seemed to be muttering mugger-mugger at the same moment, publicly for the benefit of the crowd and between themselves for their own purposes. . . . Then it appeared that the miracle had been effected, that the Defence Committee had leaped suddenly into being. . . . A young fair-haired man, who by the assurance of him, one would say, in the language of Ballycullen, was stinking with pride, proceeded to read out the names. It included the Clergy, who were ex-officio members of the Committee, but who were not present, followed immediately by the names of Thomas Cooney, Marcus Flynn and Gilbert McCormack, followed by the names of the cowardly well-dressed young men who now clung, as it were, to the brake, as if it represented their last refuge from conscription. . . . The scene and its meeting seemed to dance before Michael's mind as if out of a slimy sickness. . . . He whispered something to those near him and there was just the glimmer of indignation passing swiftly through the ranks for a moment. . . . But it was stilled into a little, cold moment of

desolation by the powerful pronouncement now proceeding from the brake. . . . A list of initial subscriptions to the Anti-Conscription Fund was now being read aloud. A generous impulse of gratitude seemed to hurry through the very heart of the meeting. The sudden murmur of disapproval was being replaced by applause, even cheering, as the various amounts astounded of a sudden by their generosity. . . . It was swiftly clear to Michael that every effort had been in vain and very terribly clear as well was the thought that this very scene was being enacted all over Ireland at this very moment so that his second great plan for the salvation of Ireland was at an end. . . . But in this, the abysmal moment of his sorrow and the wildest cry of his heart, he seemed to be hurried on between his anger and his agony to the supreme moment of his life. He had a notion that, out of all that stupid, staring throng, only one pair of eyes was upon him as he went over to the brake to make his protest. . . .

That this Defence Committee had been irregularly selected and so did not represent the true feelings of those most directly concerned, those liable for military service. . . . An agonised hush began to fall upon the crowd. It seemed that the amazing madness of his action had not been fully realised. There was an immense still-

ness in the air as if after some great catastrophe. It would almost appear as if the sky had fallen down about Ballycullen. . . .

A small man with a pinched, peevish face now rose in the brake. His small eyes and narrow slit of a mouth seemed to exude fire. He proceeded to wipe out any slight impression that Michael might have made by a spitefully contrived little blast of words. . . . The Committee had been elected and what the hell did he want by interrupting them and insulting them like this? . . . It was the general feeling of the meeting that it was disgraceful. So it was, that even one man could be found in the place prepared to make an attack upon the unity that had come upon them, and the like of which the world had never before seen. . . .

A kind of last lone silence seemed to fall upon Michael and upon the Ballycullen which he saw around him through a haze of pain. . . . Could it be that he had been finally broken even as his father had been broken?

CHAPTER XIX

AN ENEMY OF HIS PEOPLE

THE succeeding days were the most intense and startling that Michael had yet lived.

It was made to appear by every effort of mean minds and lying tongues that he had done a disgraceful thing. The looks of those he met were averted in disdain. The people who came into the shop, Volunteers and the rest, hurried out as soon as they had made their purchases or dropped the observations they had come to make about the weather or the state of Ireland.

It would appear, from the papers of the time, that a most determined attempt had been made all over Ireland to destroy any hope of extending into reality the great thing he had seen in the middle of his mind. But all Ireland seemed vastly delighted with itself because of the part it had played. There was so much blather about "a Nation's will" that one might be almost induced to think that Ireland had at last come into possession of a will. . . . Of course, Ballycullen stood by the Defence Committee it had

elected, had added its quota to this awful power, and Michael could not suddenly become aware of anything noble in the air around him. It rather seemed filled with the odour of pride, a kind of blood-begotten stench which had been wafted across Ireland from the European war. The situation was well epitomized in the fact that the feelings of Ireland were about to express themselves in the largest subscription that Ireland had ever seen. It seemed particularly fitting, indeed, in spite of its irony, that the depth and degree of Ireland's present hatred for England should be expressed in terms of the money that had been made out of England through the war. The blood of Ireland was to be spared through sheer dint of blood-money, but nothing that England had done heretofore had to such an extent perturbed those who had always availed themselves of the opportunity of making money out of every turn in the tide of affairs. For a week they were like madmen not knowing whither to turn, but seeming to think vaguely all the while that by signing their names to the anti-conscription pledge they would be somehow spared to make more money and that by joining the Volunteers, or "the Vollyunteers," as they were termed in affectionate anxiety, they would not have to fight, although someone would fight for them. . . . There was a set of wild fellows in Ireland that could always be depended

on in a push. . . . Hence this remarkable hurry to join the Volunteers, just, as a few years before, men had been running to join the United Irish League in the hope of getting a bit of land.

All the potential manhood of Ireland had already been captured again by the very forces which held with the strongest links the chains about the mind of Ireland. It was not from the Sinn Fein leaders that Michael could conceive that they would take their orders now, but from Thomas Cooney and Marcus Flynn and their like, as exemplified here in Ballycullen, the men who had made exhibitions of their qualities all over Ireland in the amounts of their subscriptions to the Anti-Conscription Fund. They were excessively self-conscious, feeling themselves the bone and sinew of the country at the present time. The fact that twopence ha'penny could still look down upon a twopence, even in the presence of death, was manifest in their every expression of opinion.

"Fellows, begad, like Mickeen Dempsey, talking about a Republic. That's the curse of God nonsense that has ruined The Cause always, fellows with no stake in the country, not caring a damn, of course, whether they play England's game or not, fellows with nothing to lose. Talking about a Republic, moryah."

"Here was a way of showing what they thought

about Ireland, but sure the most of them had subscribed nearly nothing as yet."

"They might give a shilling or so, or a half-crown, but it was men like Thomas Cooney and Marcus Flynn, with their vast subscriptions, that would save them."

"A fellow like Mickeen Dempsey was enough to give you the sick, anyway, having the cheek to go talk about Independence and about Ireland, and Marcus Flynn keeping up his mother and sister for so long."

"And what had he given to the Anti-Conscription Fund?"

"He had subscribed nothing so far, for he had objected to the way the people of the parish had elected the Defence Committee."

The feeling of antagonism against him, finding expression in such talk, was growing apace. He could feel it all the week, a rumour of conflict in the air around him. Marcus would come occasionally into the shop with a leer of contempt upon his face, but without speaking a word. His quizzical, contemptuous glance would seem to say ten thousand things, but his pride in feeling himself a kind of saviour of his country would prevent him opening his mouth.

Kevin Shanaghan came in just once for the price of a pint. His serious, remote smile seemed warmed a little into a kind of sympathy.

"D'ye know what you're after doing Michael?" he said.

"No!" said Michael dully.

"Well, you're after telling the truth and that's the greatest crime that anyone can commit in Ballycullen or in fact in any part of Ireland."

Passing the door a little later, Connor Carberry gave Michael a glance of pride through the open doorway and raised his hand to the salute. There seemed to be no need of words; they were true brothers in the kinship of love and suffering for Ireland. It was a noble gesture, surely, holding something almost lyrical in its grandeur, that flashed into life with the movement of that gnarled, withered hand.

At home there was a recurrence, very heavily, of the old shadow over the house and by the very fireside where his father had sat talking Parnellite and Fenian and rebel talk with Leum Broderick. His mother and sister, although as innocent as ever of interference in the life of Ballycullen, seemed somehow doomed to suffer still. They were content in the possession of Michael, and his mother had had no thought at any time that he would come to be mixing himself up to his misfortune with the things that had ruined his father. She had never made any attempt to understand all the books and papers he would be bringing into the lonely room. She had

made no attempt to prevent it, although she had always disliked to see him giving so much time to brooding and reading.

Now, when she saw the great quietness of a passionate determination upon him, she felt in all the strong, wise fear of her motherhood that this terrible thing called Ireland, which had ruined her man, was now throwing its shadow over the life of her son. . . . These two poor quiet souls without anger or harm. . . . He saw his own sorrow mirrored clearly in the sorrow of their eyes. . . . They were doomed to suffer again even as all three had suffered through the man who had followed Parnell. . . .

Just now the evenings were growing longer and an intense realisation of the sorrow he was about to bring upon them drove him forth again at moments when he should have made the little room, as always, a retreat from the torture of Marcus Flynn's. . . . There seemed no one left with whom he might find pleasure in a conversation of an evening. They looked at him with averted eyes and he passed amongst them as one about to be cast out by his people. He noticed that the enthusiasm of the Volunteers had begun to decline. They did not seem to be going about the Hall hurriedly, eagerly, always on military business, as it were, but stood idling around the corner, after the old fashion, listlessly, joy-

lessly. . . . They were safe again. All the strong men of Ballycullen were at the head of the fund which was to save them. . . . It seemed so recently that Michael had been striving to tell them something and in the way they eyed him, meanly, suspiciously, he perceived how very little they must think of him now. . . . Many a man amongst those who were now almost middle-aged had recognised the futility of striving to remedy all that was wrong with Ballycullen. They had been content to recognise in Michael's earlier attempts to express himself in words or action something that reminded them of their own dreams, less fine than his, perhaps, yet dreams for all that, when they, too, had thought of breaking down the hate and pride of Ballycullen for love of Ireland. . . . But to have made the attempt and failed so utterly was far worse than their own case, who had made no attempt at all. . . .

On the third evening he met Mirandolina as he wandered lonely and tortured out of the atmosphere which held such a weight of sadness for him. She would seem to have expected a meeting, so anxiously did she quicken her step upon his approach. Many a time had she hurt him here in this place, which must be, in itself, a continual cause of hurt to him, but now there was a look of compassion in her eyes which gave promise of atonement. . . .

There was no even momentary reserve between them because of anything at all that had happened. He was not anxious to remember what people had done to him, for he was too fully conscious of what he had done to himself; but she was a woman and she knew. The mother instinct had risen supreme over Ballycullen in this instant and he saw that her look was deep to her very soul with compassion. . . . She felt somehow that what had happened to him was because of things he had done for her sake. It might be for love of Ireland he had worked, but it was for love of her, too. Yet he had not wrought in the way she had intended. He had merely gone on attempting to commingle two loves, an impossibility. If only they had never met he might by this time have died for Ireland. If this insane love of Ireland had not caught him young, he might have become a better man to work for his mother and sister. . . . He might have had that little shop by the time *Sinn Fein* became such a thriving business, and made just as much out of it as Seumas McEvoy. . . . Sure all the little jealousies she had tried to fan up in his mind had only been to make him practical, to pull him down out of his dream. . . .

The truth was if only he had not been so blind he might have seen that she had loved him very beautifully always. It was for his sake solely

that she had tried to contrive the best plans for him that would come into her mind. And now to think that he was ending in this defeat and disaster.

Now she told him with such a rush of words as made everything clearer than any noonday he had ever known in Ballycullen.

“ Oh, Michael, dear, I’m sorry, sorry that ever I hurt your feelings in the least, for I know that your mind is sensitive and grander in the way it understands things than any mind that ever was here in Ballycullen. But you have wasted your sweetness on the desert air. D’ye remember a few years ago when we played together in *Robert Emmet*, and you used to have such talks with me at the rehearsals and everything. I saw the way your lofty, Nationalist notions might lead you then, and I tried to tell you, but it was no use. You were blind, blind, and it used to madden me. It made me do mad things that you must have thought me a worthless flirt on account of doing. I went walking with Ambrose Donohue, the soldier, and I used to spend the evenings talking with Seumas McEvoy, the Sinn Feiner. But sure most of the time I only used to be telling them what asses I thought the both of them, and how true I was to you, all the time, and that you were the only one I ever thought worth speaking to around Bullycullen. I used to be hearing mean

little talk about you that you never heard yourself. I knew that when you began to put yourself up as a leader here you were only making a fool of yourself. I didn't like to hurt your feelings by telling you, but God knows I was always burning to tell and I used to be more annoyed about you than you'll ever know now. . . . But now I suppose you see the truth of things at last. What will Ballycullen do for you now, what will Ireland do for you? Nothing — nothing at all. You have only me. But, Michael, dear, you have me now and always. I'll not forsake you, never fear. But for my sake, in return, you'll have to be done with your dreams. Let us think only of one another. Between us, Michael, we should be able to weather it out together, let the worst come to the worst. It's reported everywhere to-day that Marcus Flynn is going to sack you immediately, but that he's going to make himself out a great fellow by not disturbing your mother and sister. And surely we can do much better for them, the two of us, when you are away from Ballycullen. God knows, they haven't had much pleasure in their lives."

He tried to speak, but she overwhelmed him with words. She would seem to have been sent to snatch him from some final byeway of destruction. She seemed to think that he was one who might easily drift into hopelessness and the

heaviest doom of defeat. Her face was wet with hot tears as he kissed her.

"And I suppose you didn't hear that you are going to be arrested this evening?"

"Arrested for what, Mirandolina?"

"For being a spy and an informer and a traitor. It's after being well worked up by Thomas Cooney. I saw some of the best scoundrels in the Volunteers leaving it this evening; they want to disgrace you if they can before they drive you out of Ballycullen."

"But I've done nothing. I can explain. I can defend myself. I haven't explained to you yet, Mirandolina. I'm sure you can see why I acted as I did on Sunday —"

"Of course, darling. But don't demean yourself by giving them this final chance at you. Come on, darling, and we'll talk about leaving Ballycullen to-morrow."

"It may mean leaving Ireland."

As he turned to look at her the full meaning of his words seemed to blot out for an instant the very soul of Michael. . . . To think of leaving Ireland, but he must be immensely fond of Mirandolina now. . . .

"Come on!" she said.

But just then six men sprang across the demesne wall and seized him roughly.

"We arrest you in the name of the 'Irish Re-

public’,” they said, “and you must come to be courtmartialled by the Competent Volunteer Authority.”

* * * * *

Mirandolina laughed almost through her tears as she hurried back into Ballycullen. It might be just as well to convince him finally, she thought. . . . Yet as she walked, with a faintness flowing in to numb almost the very limbs that carried her, this evening of tears falling heavier momentarily, there were odd great flashes of strength from a woman’s mighty passion to sustain her. Yet was the very power of her love being blown out in these fierce gusts. . . . The distance of Ballycullen from the place where she had just dwelt in gladness for a moment with Michael seemed such a great way, surely, this misty, darkling evening. . . . Oh, God, she might never be able to walk down the street and into Thomas Cooney’s. . . . But suddenly upon the light wind came a sound of singing. The magic of a noble anger flashed her poor movement into the grace and majesty of a queen. . . . Oh, she was proud now, proud and strong again. . . . For the men who had marched Michael away were singing, almost, it appeared, with no other purpose than that of lifting her mood upon each bar of the song.

“ In valley green, on towering crag, our fathers fought
before us,
And conquered 'neath the same old flag that's proudly
floating o'er us;
We're children of a fighting race,
That never yet has known disgrace,
And as we march the foe to face
We'll chant a soldier's song.”

CHAPTER XX

EXODUS

THERE was a remarkable air of excitement about the Hall this evening. It seemed almost incredible that the lethargy of the place could have been so swiftly electrified into a lively eventfulness. But an explanation seemed to linger in the fact when Michael remembered that this evening he was about to be court-martialled in the name of Ireland. What on earth had he done? He could remember nothing. Yet his appearance here to-night must be at the bidding of *Kathleen-ni-Houlihan* to answer for some crime against her. Although there was a burning pain in his mind, he suddenly remembered himself in great company, yet not with those who had all died the same way, not with Robert Emmet or Padraic Pearse, with Wolfe Tone or Roger Casement, or any man of them at all who had fallen before the might of Britannia. There was one man who appeared in the remembered tragedy of his life and in the poor, dark ending of that life to be suddenly akin to him, and this man

was Parnell. He remembered again the supplement from the weekly papers pasted on the wall when he was a lad, and his father's words:

"There's poor Parnell, Michaelleen! the poor fellow. It's a hard case to think that it was my own very countrymen killed him. It's even worse to think that they pegged muck into his eyes and lime before they murdered him outright."

This was what his love of Ireland had brought Parnell and later the same fate to his own father, and now to him, averted looks as he was dragged into the hall to be given some sort of mock trial before being driven out by his people. . . . It was England that had tried Roger Casement, who had gone to his doom "in right noble succession and in good company." But this Volunteer Hall, where the lights were now glinting so queerly was in Ireland. The Volunteers were for Ireland and he was for Ireland. God only knew how much he was for Ireland. He was about to lose the little job, which meant so much to his mother and sister, for sake of Ireland. He felt chilled and lonely, but he thought that the eyes of Mirandolina Conway were looking into his eyes. . . . Men came thronging into the hall with an enthusiasm he had never before seen amongst the Volunteers. They had never been quite able to accomplish the pure virtue of Patriotism, but they

were well versed in all the ways of "downing" another man. They were forever prating about "Freedom" and yet an infernal hatred had ever sprung into their hearts for the men who had stood nearest to freedom in their own lives.

"The breed of Priesthunters and informers!" said someone. He looked around and there stood Connor Carberry. In his presence Michael did not feel so much alone. The "Commandant" for the district took the chair. He was a slight, fair-haired young man, with something of Michael's idealistic look, something of the trusting, kindly regard of all men which was not the look of the little people with the little eyes. . . . His sincerity was apparent, and, so dispassionate did Michael grow by turns, so perfectly objective concerning all that had determined the present mess of his life, that he thought of this young man as coming inevitably some day to know the torture that he was enduring now. Beside him sat two captains of Volunteers from neighbouring towns. The "Commandant" had contrived the best show of fair play that was possible. He was only the son of a small shopkeeper in Castleconnor and his commandantship in the Volunteers was probably beginning to help already towards the ultimate ruin of himself and his father. Perhaps the gombeenism of such as Thomas Cooney extending subtly through its power over his

father to him aimed him in its mean bondage too. So what he might do now, for sake of his own soul and of Ireland, would cause the Hall to re-echo curiously with the sound of another clanking of chains. . . . But still it was his father who would suffer most the pain of this wild effort towards release.

He proceeded to read the Constitution of the Irish Volunteers and then to ask for a definite charge against Michael. There was dead silence. . . . This was the way to treat him. Already were they cringing respectfully behind their dark scowls.

"You see," he continued, "we are a military organisation."

"Might I offer a suggestion," said, or rather stuttered, Gilbert McCormack.

"No suggestion; this is not a discussion. It is a courtmartial in the name of the Irish Republic."

"It's the finishing touch to a damnable informer that we're going to run out of Ballycullen this bloody evening."

"But there's no charge. Not a man amongst you has even had the spunk to formulate a charge."

"Oh, we don't want any of this highfalutin that you'd see in an account of a courtmartial in an English paper. We don't want to copy the British even in that, for we're the heart's blood of

true Sinn Feiners. We want to put a stop to this fellow's gallop in Ballycullen and it'll have to be done at all costs."

Now that such a successful opening had been made by this hired man, around the hall rose a low "Boo-oo-oo!" which had almost the quality of a bull's bellow. So sudden and vehement was it that it left a kind of singing in Michael's ears. Momentarily, too, it seemed to lift his blindness. But then it was another blindness again. The mixture of daylight and candlelight made each face look sickly. There crushed in around him a mass of leering, sweating faces that was almost an obscenity of the flesh like some stupendous vomit. Yet even as this dark-faced, unshaven lout stood there with such an admirable, although affected, air of antagonism, Michael knew that he was a paid man and that a good deal of free drink had gone to the creation of his present enthusiasm. It was the power of gombeenism again, so powerfully manifested always, whether it was its hoof or its head appeared, in the lineaments and significance of a beast.

"I won't drill under this man and especially on behalf of the young men of Ballycullen. I'll go so far as to say that not a man of us will drill under him."

"Why?"

The sharply interjected question of the Com-

mandant sounded clean with decision as a rifle shot in the intense, dead quietness.

"We won't have this fellow, that's all!" a few men shout in support of their champion.

"Well, you know, I, as his superior officer, have no power to remove him, seeing that I have no evidence that he has broken the constitution of the Irish Volunteers."

"Are you going to shift him? Begod, then, if you're not, I can tell you that we are!"

"Volunteers, do you dispute my authority? I have been freely elected by yourselves to this position of command over you. I should not have taken up the position had I dreamt for a moment you would not be led by me, and first, at least, against — the British."

Along three sides of the Hall were ranged accusative, unanimous Volunteers. . . . Their heads were hung down and the fact that they had no case nor no charges to make did not seem to affect the solidity with which they sat so immovably there. They were against him, that was all. The talk of the Commandant sounded far beyond them. They had come here after saying to their comrades in the pubs:

"We'll run the bastard out of the Vollyunteers and we'll do more than that. We'll make him

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out such a scandalous ruffian that the priest'll, mebbe, run him out of the bloody parish."

They could not very well go back to their masters and say that they had not been able to perform the work for which they had got the drink and the money. And so they were sullenly antagonistic if no more. . . . They punctuated their smoking by spitting hard against the floor. . . . God blast him anyway! . . . Not one of them had a word to say. . . . Was he going to beat them? Look at the way, now, that this "Commandant" fellow was taking his part. That cut about the British was a hard one.

"I want a definite charge and, further, I want someone to prove the charge. I want no silly statements, but a statement of fact which can be proved."

Still for some moments there was no reply. . . . Then a man rose, frozen, as it were, by his purpose into perfect rigidity. He was a paid man, hence his aspect of fierce sincerity. A chorus of appraisal and approval ran all around the room.

"Good man! Good man!"

They were Irish faces with the stubbles bristling upon them, their mid-week beards. They were faces of men of the country for which all the dead had died. Always there had been in the very depths of Michael an intense hatred of the soldiery of England, and after the rebellion he

had thought how splendid it would have been to die, as he looked down their rifle-barrels like Major McBride. But the faces into which he looked now seemed to hold a fearful and abysmal hatred, more terrible of itself than any death which lurked even in the red heart of a rifle. They were upon him more horribly even than the little wicked eyes of rifles fixed upon a man's heart. They were the eyes of men, and, after all, the rifle of a soldier had no soul. These men of Ballycullen and of Ireland talked of their Irish Army and of their Republic, but all seemed forgotten in this moment of mad anger against the man of clean sincerity who had sprung from amongst them. Long ago, when he had gone about Ballycullen, the lonely antagonist of England, they had distrusted him and called him "a mouth." He had been the prophet before his time and in his own country. So there was a double reason why he had not been accepted. . . . Yet was it a thing of bitter cruelty in this moment to feel that they thought him unfit for the condition which had been the dream of his life. . . . How the little, mean howl for his blood was beginning to arise from these countrymen of his who, in the name of the Irish Republic, were doing this for the very force which still threatened to sell their souls to the devil and their bodies into an enduring bondage. His blindness was lifting

higher now, yet still dark and lumpish, like the great cloud that it was showing painfully bright beneath. . . . There came little, sudden instants of intense clearness. . . . He saw Connor Carberry getting up to address the crowd. He heard him struggling with his passion to express himself in words. . . .

“Love is blind!”

This was a futile expression from a girl's novel and seemed greatly frivolous indeed to Michael as it occurred to his mind in this moment. Yet is there an immense sad truth in all poor, common things. . . . Why was Connor Carberry now striving to quiet the rabble? He, too, had been blind. His love for Ireland had blinded him to that quality in his countrymen which made real Nationality an impossibility. . . . There was this old man now going down so emptily to the grave and yet these countrymen of his were unable in this moment to think well of him or do one decent action to atone for themselves at his bidding, he who might have been a prophet amongst a more chosen people. . . . Yet in the great brightness which came rushing in rich waves across the darkness of this moment's agony, it seemed good, indeed, that this ending had come, for he might have grown old in his foolishness, and it was better, maybe, after all to be snatched a brand still a little bright from the burning. He

had been worsted in the game for sake of Ireland, but his loss had been well spent in purchase of this fulness of vision which was bursting upon him. The part of his life which had gone to the making of this moment had gone more fully to the making of him. Above the howling could now be heard the word "informer" being muttered with vehemence. . . . And this was how the intention now darting through his mind with the pain of fire must finally fix him. . . . He would have turned his coat, anyway, when he did what was his purpose now and behind the turn-coat there always lingers the suggestion of the traitor. It was thus that he would be fixed in the memory of Ballycullen down the years to be, he who had great ambitions to be very different, indeed, for sake of them. But his countrymen did not want him. He could never be of the sort that they still wished to gather to their breasts. . . . And now the miracle had happened that he had no longer any desire to be beloved by them.

His mind was galloping wildly over every thought he had had through the long days and nights of his dreaming. . . . *And what had England ever done to him?* Why, nothing at all for all he had cried out with those who cried out of ancient rages. Had he been an Englishman whose only desire was to expend himself in the service of his country, he could hardly have come

to this moment. There could be no meanness in a thought merely because it was true. *And it was Ireland that had done this to him now.*

There rushed upon him even with this thought a sadness that brought him almost instantly to tears. . . . But what of the thing they would say in Ballycullen after he had gone from it forever? The world was the place in which he would be living from henceforth. It was very painful to remember that it was the certain traitorous element in Ireland itself that was about to make him appear as a traitor, yet it stood for his emancipation also, for it was about to drive him into exile. With what amazing suddenness his decision had come to him? It is only over the things which end in nothingness and futility that one dreams and dallies. . . . To-morrow he would leave Ireland. It was Mirandolina Conway and not *Kathleen-ni-Houlihan* who had finally gathered him to herself. Yet even now, in the moment of his great decision, was his mind curiously torn. He desired to think of Ireland still, of all that was olden and beautiful in Ireland, as a rich memory, in whatever place he might happen to be. But there must be an end to all the waste and wandering of his mind. There was something more in a man's life but his country. . . . There would be Mirandolina now, his wife, his good comrade, the grander part

of himself, as well as his mother and sister still. He would have to be a realist, dealing only with facts, in whatever country he was going to and it was part of the irony of things that he could not be this same realist in his own country. Because to be such as he had vaguely seen it through his own experience, stood almost as a blasphemy of the very soul which his mother Ireland had given him. To be an idealist to the full, his head encircled by a crown of stars against a mist of dreaming, as he had seen that condition mirrored in the mind of Connor Carberry. . . . Ah, no, ah, no, indeed. . . . Had he not already drunk himself almost to destruction out of that pool of sadness? Perhaps, after all, his very defeat represented the most enduring triumph that could have come. . . . It seemed to promise the perfect realisation of himself as Mirandolina saw him, or as she hoped to make him when she had rescued him finally from his dreaming. . . . There could be no mistake about his salvation any more, for now they were howling madly. . . .

He hardly realised that he had stumbled away from the Hall and was now some distance down the road from Ballycullen, still pursued by derisive cries. Now he was passing the house of Connor Carberry. It was the house which had queerly inspired him towards the madness of sincerity and sacrifice that had brought him to

what had happened this night. It seemed very strange for a moment that Connor Carberry could have no further influence over his mind. All Connor's wild raving crushed into one epic night would not make the slightest difference in the outlook of Michael, although now probably, at this very moment, he was raising his poor old broken voice for the sake of the man who was his friend. . . . The people of Ballycullen, in their anger, had come between them, thus preventing the saying of a last good-bye. But he felt now, as he passed the place around which the shadows were gathering in, that he must go up to the window and see once more the place, the very stool, in fact, where he had once sat listening . . . listening. . . .

He drew back from the window in surprise, for there upon what had been "his" stool sat Kevin Shanaghan, who of late, since the pubs had begun to close earlier, was in the habit of coming out here to talk with Connor Carberry. It must be the strange evenings they were having together here. Michael smiled as he thought of the clash of their two minds, and further at thought of the talks it must lead them to here by the quenching fire until far on in the night. . . . This very night the thing that was himself must lead them to a queer, great talk. . . . He laughed almost as Kevin Shanaghan might laugh, and moved

back on the road towards Ballycullen. . . . In the gathering darkness he seemed to lose himself and to wander around and around for a great while in a circle of blindness and of the pain of a heart that had been wounded by itself. . . . Gradually he heard the cries that he had raised up in his people dying away down all the roads from the Hall. Even towards remote quarters of the parish, Volunteers were now speeding with the tidings of what had been done to Michael Dempsey this night in Ballycullen. . . . In the sharp pang of his thought it was thus that he became fixed before his own mind. This was exactly all that he meant to Ballycullen now, he who had striven to uplift it, he who had thought of it with noble insistence and with such dear intimacy in his dream of Ireland, the brighter microcosm of that brighter macrocosm. . . . Oh, God, would they ever see that, in loving Ireland, he had loved, too, his native village and the place where he was born? His eyes were blinded and his soul was scalded by his tears, but his feet were turned again, although for the last time, towards Ballycullen. . . .

His native village looked such a quiet, decent place now that it was so late in the night and there was no one to be seen. In the darkness, too, it always appeared to have hidden away much of its cruelty and baseness, and nearly all its great

uncharitableness. . . . As soon as he came past the Hall, that place which had made itself so dismally significant in his life, he saw the only light still remaining in Ballycullen, and, as a curious contradictory symbol, it was in an upper window of Thomas Cooney's . . . But it was Mirandolina who was in there now by that last lit lamp he might ever see in Ballycullen, preparing herself to leave Ballycullen with him, for already was it the morrow of the night that had passed. . . . It was but a few paces now to the little cottage where he had lived so long with his mother and sister. What he was going to do now would be a lonely kind of thing for them, falling down another darkness, the last, perhaps, to blind them with a full, final sorrow on their sad, quiet lives. They would be even more fearful of Ballycullen when he was gone, and they would live still more remote from it with the memories, as they would fancy, of two grand men that Ireland and Ballycullen between them had broken, a husband and a father, a son and a brother. . . . But he would not be broken and he would be a good son to them still. He might have been better, but all the love of his heart was a real thing now. . . .

He went into his room quietly and was soon making preparations for the journey. Continually was he coming upon some book or paper or

manuscript which touched him with some memory of the life out of which he was passing. . . . All the seditious literature he had gathered into this place seemed so meaningless now. It did not appear even worth burning as a precaution against a search of the place for "stuff" by the Sergeant after he was gone. But there was something which, to cleanse his conscience, he must burn, just as he had burned his plans for a rising here in this very room. It was the manuscript of the scheme he had sketched out so recently of uniting the country in the grip and consistence of a powerful and sensible plan. How futile the very thought of this seemed now? His plan for a rebellion had been justified to some extent by the rising of Easter, 1916. But this! Lord God Almighty! And to think that the mad conversation between Connor Carberry and Kevin Shanaghan was going on even now in the little house from which he had drawn a portion of his inspiration, wild thing that it all must have been to result only in this. . . . A madman and a fool, as they called them in Ballycullen, were still fighting out the puzzle of Ballycullen between them. . . . In a moment of stark consciousness he stopped in his thought to picture them together, almost to listen. . . . In the poignant calm of the summer night he seemed to hear, borne on the rich wonder of the stillness, the glad-

some ring of the fool's wise laughter; he almost saw the sane sincerity of the madman's noble, burning eyes. . . .

And why were they wasting what strength of mind and body still remained from their broken years in talking of what had just befallen him, and then of Ireland, until almost the early dawn of the summer morning? Why, only because they must still be a fool and a madman to Ballycullen, for it was thus, it seemed, that the place of their birth would fix them eternally. . . . He was breaking away and they would remember him as an informer. . . . Ah, well, who knew? But he must burn the manuscript anyhow. Did this remain it might come through chance to prove his sincerity. And he did not want that; he did not want anything from them now. . . .

As the torn pages flickered into ashes in the grate he felt somehow that this was no doleful act of renunciation and that none of the ashes of his soul commingled with the dust of all his dreaming for love of Ireland. . . .

Mirandolina would be ready now . . . and it was a wide, wide world. . . .

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